

WHEN GOD WAS GREEN AND DANCING

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the cultural elders who have tended these seeds for a time beyond their own. What goodness we have is thanks to their courage and genius. As revelers in ecstasy have long prayed while dancing about the roots of the world: Let it grow, let it flow.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Call me a relic, call me what you will
Say I'm old-fashioned, say I'm over the hill
Today's music ain't got the same soul
I like that old time Rock & Roll
Still like that old time Rock & Roll
That kind of music just soothes the soul
I reminisce about the days of old
With that old time Rock & Roll

(Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band, 1978)

This work is the expression of a life spent digging for truth at the base of the ancient tree that seeded our world and civilization. I know that many of us are hungry for such old truths. Some of us are even born scrambling for these secrets like hungry orphans, and might die while still scrambling, or might be fortunate enough to gain some mouthfuls of that nectar, enough to keep the soul alive anyway. I think it wasn't always this way. Things may be getting harder for seekers, who must now try to maintain the necessary madness and inner freedom within modern institutions. At the very least, this may be a difficult time for those in love with truth and soul. I hope to bless whom and what I can with the knowledge I've sought, like a tracker returning from the deep forest in the midst of harsh winter, meat half-frozen and frost still clinging to furs and boots.

More than a century ago, Julia Somserset, née Hamilton, born 1901 to the 11th Baron of Belhaven and Stenton in Scotland and married to Fitzroy Richard Somerset, amateur anthropologist and the 4th Baron of Raglan in Wales, became fascinated by a series of images she found carved into the wood of Llangwm Church in Monmouthshire near her home. Upon discussing these carvings with the vicar of her church, Lady Raglan (1939) was drawn down a trail of investigation, including discussions with learned peers such as the Revd. J. Griffiths, who heard about Raglan's quest and, seeking out the erstwhile lady, revealed to her a collection of similar images in the woodwork of his own church.

The carvings were of "a man's face, with oak leaves growing from the mouth and ears, and completely encircling the head" (Lady Raglan, 1939, p. 45). These came to be known generally as the *foliate masks*, though they varied greatly in specifics. Some of the faces were benign, wise, and kind. Others looked frightened, angry, or sad. In each case, the face of a man fused in some way with green and flourishing vegetation. As Raglan (1939) described:

In some the man wears a beard as well as a beard of leaves ... in others he is beardless, and the leaves spring from his forehead, cheeks and lips, as in two in Norwich

Cathedral ... and one in the Church of the Dominicans,
Ghent. ... In others the branches issue from the mouth and
ears, as in examples from Rochester tower ... and
Norwich ... or from the mouth only, as in Southwell
Minster ... [and] Semur-en-Auxois. (p. 47)

Lady Raglan (1939) concluded that these figures—found throughout the English countryside and indeed much of Europe—represented a single mythic spirit echoing back into Europe’s primordial past yet who was strangely preserved in the wood and stone of Christian churches. To understand this figure, Raglan had some help, for a few decades earlier one Sir James Frazer had caused quite a stir with his expansive study of pagan fertility traditions in Europe and around the world. With folkloric context provided by *The Golden Bough* (1890/1904), Raglan saw the carvings as a portrayal of the ancient god at the heart of Frazer’s work: the patron of cycles of death and rebirth, the king of nature.

My father was a lifelong fan of the Green Man. In high school, he had founded a mushroom appreciation club for study of local fungi. At university, he had the privilege to learn with illuminated ecologists like Gregory Bateson - this was at UC Berkeley in its glory days. He went on to become a holistic chiropractor, first in Alaska and then in Oregon, where I would

soon be born. In fact, my father met my mother at the famous sauna of the Oregon Country Fair, “The Ritz,” that beating nocturnal heart of a lingering bastion of 60’s counterculture, back when the memory was still fresh and strong.

I grew up surrounded by images of the Green Man, courtesy of my father, himself an understated heir of the ancient tradition. I don’t think my father thought about the Green Man per se - he certainly never spoke about the figure to me - but he was a lifelong gardener, and in many ways he lived in that figure’s spirit, and certain artifacts were on display throughout the house. In his private library, one could find on display Anderson’s (1990) *Green Man: The Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth*.

Mythic Poverty and Autochthonous Creativity

After years of contending with the suffering olympics of contemporary academia, I refuse to spend much time on questions of identity positioning. The fact is that we are, in the present moment, almost universally cultural orphans dealing consciously or unconsciously with the prices we’ve paid and the clans and lands we’ve lost. In an interconnected world, arguments over who has lost the most or whose ancestors have most egregiously sinned quickly becomes nonsensical.

We come to this discourse now in the shared fact of being these cultural orphans, because the fact is that colonization creates colonizers. We lost our cultural wealth, including our myths, and this becomes a relational and ecological problem at the point that it creates mythic orphans who are compelled by hunger they don't even understand. Such are the hungry ghosts of certain cosmologies, which collectively form whole dimensions of existence, whole hell realms of insatiability and robbery. The orphans of such realms are driven to grasp for that which they sense might feed an emptiness in themselves, which from their perspective is a lack of meaning in existence. Jung (1933) articulated this early in the appropriately titled *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, and half a century before that, in his own Green Man treatise, Nietzsche (1872/1993) had already written:

Without myth all culture loses its healthy and natural creative power. ... Let us now, by way of comparison, imagine abstract man, without the guidance of myth—abstract [p. 110] education, abstract morality, abstract justice, the abstract state. ... Let us imagine a culture without a secure and sacred primal site, condemned to exhaust every possibility and feed wretchedly on all other cultures—there we have our present age ... bent on the

destruction of myth. And here stands man, stripped of myth, eternally starving, in the midst of all the past ages, digging and scrabbling for roots, even if he must dig for them in the most remote antiquities. What is indicated by the great historical need of unsatisfied modern culture, clutching about for countless other cultures, with its consuming desire for knowledge, if not the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home, the mythical womb? Let us consider whether the feverish and sinister agitation of this culture is anything other than a starving man's greedy grasping for food—and who would wish to give further nourishment to a culture such as this, unsatisfied by everything it devours, which transforms the most powerful, wholesome nourishment into “history and criticism”? (pp. 109-110)

Heaven forbid we become such critics - but in fact, this is not the only path to downfall. Another route is to become superficial synthesizers, duct-taping a patchwork of half-examined scraps that we barely understand into some semblance of a tapestry, the home-rug for which we so hungrily yearn. It is not the synthesis that is the problem, nor is it the “appropriation.” Humans should never be made ashamed of their cultural ingenuity nor propensity for imitation and its dear

daughter, innovation. What foolishness! This is the process that has driven human ingenuity and culture itself since prehistory.

No, the problem is not the gathering of threads nor the weaving of the tapestry. The problem is superficial understanding and lack of initiation, which results in sloppy weaving. My academic advisor, philosopher Jorge Ferrer (2017) described the praxis of the ideal intercultural encounter as *participatory pluralism*, which:

should not be motivated by politically or spiritually correct attitudes (often rooted in cultural guilt) but by a blend of epistemological boldness and humility that embraces the potential value of different epistemic frameworks, while concurrently acknowledging the limits of the analytic rationality cultivated in the modern West. (p. 54)

Within this description, one finds embedded a number of related ideas. One is an insight regarding the paralytic effects of shame—or “cultural guilt” (Ferrer, 2017, p. 54)—on genuinely meaningful and cocreative dialogue. Submission and dominance—whether based in intimidation or in shame and repression—are no basis for creative encounters. Attempts to kowtow to an ideology unavoidably poison the well of genius, because genius arises from the spontaneity of truth, which is authenticity.

A second fundamental tenet of participatory pluralism is that there are no neutral observers. This tenet is related to the first, because the assumption of an “objective” and “neutral” position is another way of dominating the discourse with a presumed authority, which kills the creativity of the genuine living encounter. Thus, as Enlightenment rises, the Great God Pan dies, not because secularism is the problem but because its presumption of self-certain correctness denies an equal respect for worldviews and lifeforms beyond its own.

The superiorism built into such dogmatic secularism are what we see when we behold some of the assumptions of the Victorian anthropologists. In the century and a half since, those assumptions have been challenged and are now in crisis, but they still retain a globally dominant position, in part because they play the key role in justifying unsustainable economic activity since the industrial revolution. The role that the Christendom once played for the kings of Europe, justifying their rule in the name of God, is now performed by the secular superiorism that pardons the military-industrial complex for any excess in its service to modernity’s gods: progress, democracy, technology, and the golden idol of profit.

Exploitative industries depend on resource extraction and have no use for a world ensouled. If trees have souls, their use

as lumber is complicated. It is not in the interest of profit to challenge materialistic or secular worldviews, and so this challenge has fallen to the counterculture, including its philosophers and ecologists, whose motivations have generally been truth and the life systems on which we all depend. To break free from secular scientism as a scholar of the modern academy is not so simple - it requires a radical, determined, and courageous bent. As Stover (2002) put it:

The politics of kinship requires a scholar to give up both the subterfuge of being a mere individual and the sham of treating as simply normative what is actually European American discourse. By acknowledging his or her communal identification and the cultural and religious accent of his or her discourse, a scholar will no longer pretend to slip into the field of discourse anonymously as though he or she were an apolitical individual without a "community" or a "tradition." When cultural identity is acknowledged by a scholar, she or he will be in a better position to ... enter into relations of reciprocity. ... It is this experience of relatedness that fosters decolonizing of knowledge since relatedness rather than knowledge becomes privileged; consequently, knowledge is no longer a matter of power relations between "self" and "other" but

of kinship relations in which knowledge of each other extends freely in both cultural directions as a process of relational reciprocity. (p. 191)

To relinquish objectivity does not devalue the learned. Cultural elders are to be treasured, and knowledge is key to culture. The scholar—like the artist—is therefore a type of cultural creative, engaged specifically in the creation of knowledge. When performed as an act of community, of ecology, scholarship—like art—is a creative act and a meaningful response to the impoverishment of myth, soul, and culture (e.g., Jung, 1933; Nietzsche, 1872/1993).

To recognize that we are culturally situated does not mean that we should become tribalistic about our identities. Tribalism is in fact a demonstration of fragility: a underlying insecurity about one's own richness of culture and spirit. In contrast, there is a generous reciprocity that characterizes those who have homegrown gifts to share. This is the true meaning of ancestry, which is not bound by bloodline nor supplied by a genealogical record, but is rather a living garden. Like any garden, this isn't given to you and doesn't thrive on its own. It is a cultivation into which you pour your attention and love across the years.

The fruits that grow from such a garden over time are what give rise to the “blend of epistemological boldness and

humility” (Ferrer, 2017, p. 54) needed for right intercultural relations. Unfortunately, most of modern humanity hasn’t experienced this sensation of ancestral rootedness. Tragically, it is precisely such uprootedness that results in a mythically starving people who are thus compelled to become hungry ghosts. In contrast, when one is steeped in ancestral traditions, what need remains for theft or shame?

If the problem is this kind of mythic starvation, then the question is indeed that of gardens: that is, of fertility’s renewal. How could anyone keep fed a world of beings who cannot grow their own food? The deeper tragedy here is that not only does the hunger of modernity seem all-consuming - and the Earth’s regenerative abundance is not limitless - but this same modernity also fails to perceive the value of the nourishment it takes. The ashamed and desperate cannot value what feeds them, and this is a symptom of a lack of intimacy with the web of life and the spiritually intense processes that give rise to food.

The only humane response to this hungry world is to teach people how to grow food once more in a sustainable way. Culturally speaking, the seeds and technologies of our own mythic abundance have not been entirely lost—they remain scattered about our ancestral roots, hidden in our dreams, and

buried in our own bodies. This is what I call *autochthonous creativity*—autochthonous is a word that points to the underworld of a particular place, those rich layers of local soil that grow into unique ecologies and unique local gods.

What is “indigenous?” The word has become highly political and a symbol of power politics. Originally speaking, however, indigenous is an adjective that really means belonging to a place, having grown up from its soil. Taking geographic roots too literally is in fact insensible. Ancestrally speaking, even the most local tribe on Earth descended from migrations. Modern humans everywhere have emerged from continuous millennia of ancestral displacement and cultural change, including borrowing, and identity politics of indigeneity are therefore necessarily based on a false dichotomy.

A deeper rootedness in human indigeneity must therefore turn toward our own autochthonous spirits and bodies, and living gardens of our unique cultural richness and ancestral rivers. This is a turn away from weaponized tribalism in favor of a deeper embrace of one’s own ancestral myths, dreams, and embodied experience—for these are the layers of cultural creativity that remain autochthonously fertile even after thousands of years. From here, we may learn to grow gardens again and to feed our spirits and those of our people, our

communities. If enough do this, the world may be fed, which means that the plague of hungry ghosts may be ameliorated. This is what's needed.

Such a turn toward the neglected gardens of the soul can only begin when we admit the neglect and acknowledge our shared cultural poverty. If it helps, we can make this more specific and call it simply a mythic poverty, a forgetting of myths. Campbell (1949) put it succinctly: "Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream." (p. 19) The modern world is certainly not poor of religions, nor of spiritual conceptions, nor of practices. With contemporary interconnectedness of information, we are indeed richer in information than we've ever been. Yet, the kind of knowledge born in dreams has never been a matter of access to information, but emerges from a deeper experience. This same source is the well of myth, and it is within these blue-black watery depths of soul that the modern human, both secular or religious, is running dry.

This famine of our deepest nature within turns out to be inseparable from the crises now plaguing the lifeworld that we share. For all our triumphs, the alienation that haunts the modern soul is the same that is choking the biosphere. Yet, as we see this, we must also recognize that this alienation is

neither universal nor innate to us as people, but is the result of particular historical and cultural processes. We have the capacity to learn to care for the soil—and I believe that this begins first within the autochthonous soil of our own bodies and dreaming souls. From there, our care can extend to our people, our culture. Perhaps then it is possible for our shared soil to find renewal.

The Horned One and The God of Masks

It is 18th century Paris, and a group of laborers are working to repair the main altar in the Notre Dame Cathedral. In the course of their repairs, they break through the stonework of the floor and make a startling discovery. Beneath what they took as the Christian foundations of the great church there is preserved an old Celtic altar that dates back to before Roman times. It is a stone cube, engraved not with the foliate mask so popular in the later Medieval Christian churches but rather with an even older depiction: a man from whose forehead sprout the antlers of a stag.

Accompanying this image is a name, carved into the stone. It reads Cernunnos, literally “The Horned One.” The excavators and clergy are shocked by this discovery in their holiest of sanctums, and alight with fears of witchcraft or devilry. But research reveals that this is not a portrayal of some demon, but

rather than that of an old Celtic god of life buried beneath the cathedral when it was first built.

This event, it turns out, was not isolated. Christianity in Europe and beyond was quite literally constructed atop a pagan foundation. As Evans (1988) summarized, “After the triumph of Christianity in Europe, churches were often built on the sites of ancient pagan temples, and the Cathedral of Notre Dame apparently was built on one such site originally dedicated to Cernunnos” (p. 139).

Evans (1988) goes on to describe Cernunnos as “a horned god who was associated with animals, seasonal cycles, and sexuality.” (p. 139) Notably, besides the horns, this description could apply equally to Green Man figures like the May King. Indeed, looking more closely, one finds that a number of mythic figures exist combining these motifs, fusing the plant and animal associations. Among the Romans, in the Classical tradition, Pan certainly incorporated both aspects—and before this, among the Greeks, Dionysius did the same.

As far as the foliate masks go, the image no doubt emerged in part from the local pagan folklore of Medieval European people, as in the case of Cernunnos. On the other

hand, one finds very similar carvings of a man's face surrounded by leaves and vines appearing on stone tombs and ancient ruins from the Roman Empire. Indeed, some of these Roman carvings were accessible to Medieval artists, and thus as Matthews (2001) noted, "the medieval masons probably began by copying the early Roman leaf masks: but they added details of their own" (p. 24). This begs the question, however, as to the source of the Roman carvings. Their most likely origin, as Anderson (1990) wrote,

would seem to be the [Greek] mystery religions, particularly the Dionysiac rites. As the Green Man first appears as a leaf mask, the most obvious source for this would seem to be either the mask of Dionysos used in initiation ceremonies, or theatrical masks. (p. 45)

The twin masks of comedy and tragedy are of course famous as the symbol of modern theater—but this double visage originated long ago as the logo of the Classical Athenians' Great Theater of Dionysius. In fact, as I touch on in Chapter 6, the association of Dionysius with masks was even older than this—probably older than Athens itself. In this very early Greek tradition, the images of the vegetal Green Man and the Horned God were certainly merged, for as Anderson (1990) noted, "Dionysos was associated both with horns and snakes and with

vegetation. Euripides calls him in *The Bacchae* ‘a horned god and a god crowned with serpents’” (p. 34).

This figure, both horned and vegetal, can in turn be traced back to the spirit that Marija Gimbutas (1974) has called the *ithyphallic masked god*—and whom she and other Goddess reconstructionists have identified as the consort, offspring, and only significant male ally of the Great Goddess. Anderson (1990) described him in similar terms, as

son, lover, and guardian of the Great Goddess, he is often portrayed in sculptures wearing a bull mask and horns. He is the god from whom Dionysos descends and as, in turn the Green Man first appears in Roman art in the context of the Dionysiac mysteries, this god, although never as far as I know in these early forms portrayed with leaves, can be seen as an ancestor of the Green Man. (p. 34)

What becomes apparent is the sheer mythic persistence of a figure appearing in slightly changing guises again and again from the earliest recorded histories through the Classical period, into Medieval architecture, and subsequently into the ecological motifs of the present day. The extraordinary vegetal effulgence of the ivy and vine begin to seem like suitable representations indeed—for as with the irrepressible growth of

such plants, the images of the Green Man have arisen again and again in spite of any efforts to suppress him.

As with the ancient shine of Cernunnos excavated from beneath Notre Dame's main altar; as with the Victorian-era Christian Sir James Frazer (1890/1994) helping to usher in a pagan revival; as with the symbols of the ancient vegetal god discovered in the Church's literal woodwork; it is as if this god of vegetal vitality has simply refused to lay down and die. In Matthews (2001) words: "The fact is that he was too deeply embedded in the consciousness of the ordinary people to be forgotten ... the foliate heads remained as a constant reminder of older forces at work in the world" (p. 24).

In recent centuries, while the foliate masks have certainly attracted attention as a symbol of ecology and environmentalism, most deep inquiry into the archetype has centered around the Greek Dionysius (e.g., Evans, 1988; Kerényi, 1976; Nietzsche, 1872/1993; Otto, 1965). It is interesting that these two figures—Dionysius and the Green Man—have not been more obviously associated in the popular imagination, for the general consensus of comparative anthropologists who have engaged the topic is clear (e.g., Anderson, 1990; Frazer, 1890/1994; Matthews, 2001); as Anderson (1990) summarized:

Dionysos, whether as a vegetation god, an inspirer of divine madness and intoxication, or the revealer of mysteries of the creative force of life and of the underworld, was one of the most universal manifestations of the archetypal common cause of the Green Man. (p. 34)

It is true that Dionysius is a particularly fascinating figure, in part because his tradition ended up both highly elaborated and well-recorded by the Classical Athenians. Part of the fascinating uniqueness of golden-age Attica stems from the fact that it stood at the junction of traditional oral culture and an increasingly literate city-state (c.f. Abram, 1997)—hence, as legend says, Socrates was an illiterate oral teacher, while his student Plato was a prolific writer. The Dionysian tradition, then, must have also been surfing these changing waves—and so from its wild mountain revelries and ecstatic wilderness rites, Dionysianism was adapted to inform some of the central institutions of the Athenian state (see Goldhill, 2004).

Modernity, generally loyal to Enlightenment values, tends to emphasize the “Apollonian” awakening of mathematics, science, refined arts, and so forth. Yet, as Nietzsche (1872/1993) emphasized, part of the genius of Athenian culture was precisely its harmonization of such Apollonian trends with equally central elaborations of Dionysianism: ecstasy, instinct,

mysticism, and so on. Indeed, not only the emergence of Greek theater but also Athenian democracy as a whole can be argued to be, in part, a late flourishing of the Dionysian tradition, which was, after all, a religion of egalitarian mysticism that tended to be favored by the rural lower classes. As Conner (1996) put it:

Dionysiac worship ... inverts, temporarily, the norms and practices of aristocratic society. They make it possible to think about an alternative community, one open to all, where status differentiations can be limited or eliminated, where speech can be truly free. It is a society that can imagine Dionysiac equality and freedom. (p. 222)

This theory is bolstered by the fact that the ceremonial center of the Athenian democracy was, arguably, not the governmental Acropolis but the Theater of Dionysius—for it was at that immense amphitheater that the Great Dionysia was held as the premier theatrical and religious event of the region. In the midst of these ceremonies, during which Dionysius explicitly presided, the political bonds of the Athenian state were renewed (c.f. Goldhill, 2004).

Thus, Dionysius is central in the history of what Anderson (1990) called the “archetypal common cause of the Green Man” (p. 34)—for he stands as a bridge between traditional oral culture and the emerging forms of modernity, representing the

ancient nature god's transition between these two milieus. No wonder cultural scholars such as Nietzsche (1872/1993) and Otto (1965) have found Dionysius so evocative—for like the foliate masks, he is an important link to a mostly forgotten past in which modernity's ancestors were not so alienated from nature and its regenerative vitality.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that a myopic focus on the Greek period misleads as much as it reveals, for modernity's history did not begin with the Greeks. While Dionysius may be a highly developed and rich expression of the Green Man, the Greeks did not invent the archetype. On the contrary, as I argue in subsequent chapters, they inherited the foundations of Dionysianism from much more ancient roots. As Matthews (2001) wrote: "These early manifestations of the Green Man certainly did not originate in the Classical or medieval worlds. His true origins lie in the spiritual intuitions of tribal peoples" (p. 22).

This is an intimation that points back toward Gimbutas's (1974) ithyphallic masked god, whom Goddess reconstructionists have typically traced to an allegedly matriarchal civilization of Neolithic Europe (e.g., Gimbutas, 1974; Gottner-Abendroth, 1980/1995; Sjöö & Mor, 1987). As I review in Chapter 5, the historicity of the Neolithic matriarchy

theory is highly questionable. Given the lack of sufficient historical evidence to rigorously confirm or deny the theory, it seems fair to say that visions of Neolithic matriarchy may be just about as accurate—and just as ideologically constituted—as their inverse: masculinist fantasies of a primordial “survival of the fittest,” “red in tooth and claw.” Such postulates regarding “original” and “natural” states of human nature—particularly when historical confirmation is more or less impossible—warrant a degree of skepticism. Probably, the worship of both gods and goddesses has coexisted since the dawn of human culture, as women and men have similarly coexisted. In parallel, the historical reality probably falls between the extremes of the two visions: no doubt violent struggle has always played a role in survival, and it seems equally clear that tribal cooperation and ecological sensitivity have been just as crucial in the success of communities.

With this in mind, the mythos of the Green Man—a figure who is ecological and relational but also clearly male and virile—does seem to be situated somewhere between these two extremes. Goddess reconstructionists have typically relegated the ecological-masculine, the “consort/son” of the Goddess (e.g., Raphael, 2000, p. 43), to a supporting and servile role, but at least such feminist reconstructions have tended to value myth

and ecology, which is more than can be said for the violent masculinist vision of history. This may be why recent Green Man theorists have tended to accept the matriarchal reconstructions—as did Anderson (1990), who opined:

The remote origins of the Green Man are probably to be found in the religion of Old Europe—the matriarchal religion of the Neolithic period of the first farmers centered on and around the Danube Basin. Many of the countryside customs associated with the great festivals of the agricultural year, with ploughing and sowing, harvesting, and the slaughter of the beasts, are considered by some to derive from these remote times in the fifth and fourth millennia before Christ. (p. 34)

This account basically parrots Goddess reconstructionists, and beyond its general lack of evidentiary support, I would argue that this particularly overreaches in attempting to identify a singular geographical origin point for the mythos. There is no evidence that either the Great Goddess or the Green Man were invented in any particular place—rather, as far as the evidence goes, the figures of fertility and ecstasy seem to appear ubiquitously, as if endemic to indigenous ecospirituality itself, perhaps embedded in the daily experience of people everywhere when attuned to their own natural rhythms. Thus, while on one

hand parroting the matriarchal Neolithic origin above, Anderson (1990) also noted that Green Man figures have been found all across the world, including throughout the Americas:

There are, of course, in other cultures many cases of deities and spirits who are associated with plants and forests or who are portrayed coming out of foliage. There is the dangerous spirit of the Brazilian forests, Curupira, who has green teeth and green feet. His heels are in front so that any tracker would follow him in the opposite direction from the one he travelled in. I have been sent tantalizing details of an Amerindian Green Man. The Aztec corn god Xipe Tótec is the god of spring, who has to sacrifice his skin before new growth can arise. He is also the shoot of corn; in a Nahuatl poem he sings: "Emerald is my heart. I shall see the gold water." Rich and varied examples such as these come from all over the world. (p. 20)

Considering Frazer's (1890/1994) thousands of pages of examples, and recognizing that even *The Golden Bough* was nowhere near to comprehensive, it becomes evident that an exhaustive analysis of Green Man figures is far from realistic—for the archetype would certainly appear to be, at the very least,

“quasi-universal” (Doniger, 1996, p. 112). Thus, defining a scope for the inquiry is a pragmatic as well as a theoretical matter.

Given the goals I have defined in terms of modernity’s own restoration from ancestral and ecological alienation, focusing on modernity’s cultural ancestry seems sensible. Dionysius, of course, has emerged as a promising prospect for such restoration—but on the other hand, Dionysius has already received quite considerable attention and analysis by cultural scholars.

Furthermore, neither Greek culture generally nor Dionysius specifically emerged out of thin air, for both were descended from more ancient roots, stretching back through multiple influences and ancestries. If the intention is to seek for cultural and mythic origins, then an argument may be made for following the lineage back as far as one can—and this trail clearly does not end with the Greeks. So where does it end?

If one were to follow the lead of the Goddess reconstructionists, one might conclude that the trail leads back to the Neolithic and the ithyphallic masked god—yet, to me, this seems both too far and not far enough. For if one is willing to exceed the historical record, then there is no reason to stop at the Neolithic, for the mythic figures of ecstasy likely stretch back into humankind’s primordial past, if not simply to

cosmically universal archetypes. On the other hand, if one wishes to stay with historical rigor, the beginning would be the earliest known examples in the historical record—that is, namely, the Sumerians of Mesopotamia, who are the source of the oldest textual records ever discovered, the earliest recorded ancestors of what would become modern civilization, and the earliest recorded myths of the fertility tradition.

To trace the motifs of the ecological gods from the Sumerian period up to Greek Dionysianism is to help complete the historical picture of the archetypal tradition that others have begun. That is, as I have referenced herein, a strong link has already been made between Dionysius and the later Medieval emergence of the Green Man. This inquiry into the pre-Dionysian Green Man tradition complements the existing scholarship, completing the link between the archetype's most ancient recorded forms and its contemporary re-emergence as an ecological symbol.

Throughout this work, I largely seek to stay within the historical channel leading from ancient Sumer into the cultures of the Classical Mediterranean. This is by no means an implication that the fertility traditions have not prospered elsewhere, for they have. It is, rather, a recognition of the need to restore modernity's own ancestral roots of enchantment, such

that contemporary mythic impoverishment might be healed by the remembering of autochthonous creativity—not, as has been so criticized, by the unconscious effort to “feed wretchedly on all other cultures” (Nietzsche, 1872/1993, pp. 109–110).

To judge by the extraordinary resurgence of the images of the Green Man across so many thousands of years, it would seem that these mythic seeds remain powerfully alive and vital even still. Perhaps, then, the archetype might guide us deeper into the secrets and powers of regeneration that are so clearly needed now—both within the devastated nature and within the modern culture of the present day.

Enchantment and Participation

Certainly not everyone will consider *re-enchantment* to be a desirable direction forward. Secularists, materialists, and rationalists are likely to see enchantment as a devolution from the hard-earned ideals of Enlightenment progress. Such ideals are not only scientific, they are also steeped in the historical overthrow of religious repression of intellectual and personal freedoms. Though such repression has, historically, predominantly come from the major monotheistic religions, Enlightenment thinking tends to group all kinds of “superstition” and mysticism into a category of oppressive traditionalism. In such a view, a turn toward the numinous

powers of ancient archetypes is likely to seem not only unscientific but dangerous and regressive.

One of the biggest problems with this view is that it assumes that secularism itself is a neutral and fair position—the objective truth. That is to say, only *other* traditions represent bias; the secular frame is simply logical. In fact, as scholars like Ferrer (2017) have rigorously documented, this is no less an example of metaphysical bias than any other. What emerges from such critiques is the growing recognition that no singular perspective or epistemological system represents “the whole truth”—any knowledge system or episteme, if assumed to be universal, becomes oppressive by nature, for any other must be taken as lesser and wrong.

This is one of the key insights of Ferrer’s (2017) participatory pluralism: namely, that secularism is its own type of metaphysical framing, or to put it another way, that disenchantment is rationalist modernity’s own great religion. The point of such an insight is not to tear down materialist metaphysics or any metaphysics—rational materialism, after all, has proven to be exceedingly good at certain things, giving rise for example to unprecedented technological miracles. On the other hand, to judge by the world’s ecological state among other

issues, it would seem that rational materialism has also been exceedingly bad at some things.

There is a link, then, between participatory pluralism and ecological thought—and not only a superficial association. Participatory pluralism is ecological in the sense that it recognizes reality as multiple rather than singular—as if knowing, like ecology itself, teems with diverse forms. Liberation, from such a perspective, does not result from overthrowing the tyranny of one species with the tyranny of another. Liberation exists in the teeming plurality and its web of cocreative relations—this is the nature of an ecosystem.

From such a perspective, secular humanism, no less than any other religion, represents a particular perspective that can become a dominating ideological force. Indeed, “humanism” may be quite aptly named—for it tends to be blind to that which falls beyond “the ego-complex” (Hillman, 1975, p. 114). The realms of psyche, soul, and dream do not move according to the values of humanism—and neither does nature. In this sense, elevating the comfort and convenience of humans to the highest of moral priorities can be seen to contribute to the ecological imbalances the world now faces—and probably also contributes to a psychological fragility that perceives the whole of humankind as wounded children in need of rescue (c.f. Hillman,

1990/2016i). Hillman (1990/2016h) saw such an infantilizing psychology as insulting and disempowering to the human spirit—as well as an abdication of ecological responsibility—and thus saw good therapy, in part, as a restoration of people to an attitude of full citizenship within both society and within the shared dream of myth and imagination:

Imagine the consulting room and the ritual of the hour to be the moment when *mythos* enters *polis* through pathos and the patient is no longer analysand or client but citizen suffering in his and her heart the ill afflicting the soul of the world. For we are victims only in so far as we imagine ourselves victims, disempowered only in so far as we do not grant imagination its powers. (p. 244)

It was with this perspective that Hillman (1970/2013d) wrote: “The problems of the psyche were never solved in Classical times nor by archaic peoples through personal relationships and ‘humanizing’, but through the reverse: connecting them to impersonal dominants” (p. 128). Secularism cannot typically make this mythic leap—for how could secularism begin to imagine that the rational human’s failures may require help from other-than-human and other-than-rational realms? As a therapist breaking from the tyranny of this secular mode, then, Hillman (1994/2016q) found himself asking

questions like: “Can I make linkages outside of time—linkages to myth and stories rather than to human happenings? Can I see changes ... as magic?” (p. 221).

What is magic? The word itself startles the disenchanted mind whose range of possibilities has been so narrowed. Just as crop monocultures narrow the gene pool of an ecology to dangerous degrees, so a mythic monoculture narrows a peoples’ consciousness such that they cannot easily see beyond the assumptions of that mode (c.f. Shiva, 1993). Ironically, secular disenchantment—while attempting to deny myth altogether—has come to represent the most widespread and monocultural mythos of the world today. The idea of enchantment and magic is thus illuminated: when the collective is caught up in a mythic monoculture of what is imaginable, then anything beyond those boundaries must be, as Hillman (1994/2016q) implied, as unimaginable “as magic” (p. 221).

Hanegraff (2003) detailed how the longing for what is repressed by secular rationalism creates considerable attraction to magic and occultism, as one finds within contemporary counterculture. In the midst of the monoculture, people unconsciously yearn for the realms of possibility that have been cut off. Thus, forces of magic—or, if one prefers, Hillman’s (1970/2013d) “impersonal dominants” (p. 128)—can be a

breaking open of secularism, like indigenous varieties of maize might spontaneously resurface in the genetic expression of domesticated corn. Such an understanding of archetypal breakthrough may give a unique context to Heidegger's (1966/1981) infamous late-life conclusion that "Only a god can save us" (p. 57)—for he went on to explain himself thus:

The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline. (p. 57)

To read such words theologically is one thing—to read them pluralistically and ecologically is something else. For Heidegger's (1966/1981) "state of decline" could be synonymous with the monoculture of secular disenchantment, and thus to posit that "only a god can save us" (p. 57) could be a recognition that the secular bounds of imagination—capable only of humanizing solutions—are thus incapable of addressing modernity's imbalances with nature and psyche. In this sense, what is required may indeed be *magic*: paradigmatic change beyond what a disenchanted modernity is capable of imagining. Such would explain the call for re-enchantment.

The call is urgent to the degree that the secular monoculture has materialized not only as a crisis of soul but also a crisis of ecology. This occurs because a disenchanted nature—one in which wild things are no longer perceived as ensouled—is not a nature considered worthy of deep respect and relationship. Nature without soul is only good for superficial appreciation at best, callous exploitation at worst—for its value, under “humanism,” is entirely reducible to usefulness for humans. Given this breakdown of relationship with nature, enchantment becomes an ecological imperative—or as Aldo Leopold (1944) put it, conservation efforts will never succeed “without creating a new kind of people” (p. 1).

The notion that the fundamental paradigm of modernity might be suspect, even potentially world-destroying, is gaining traction as evidence of a variety of global crises mounts. While there have always been thinkers, poets, naturalists, and so on who have been wary of secular materialism, its downsides are increasingly evident in the face of the nonresponsiveness of materialistic corporations and governments to ecological disasters that are becoming too extreme to deny. The possibilities of techno-dystopia and techno-apocalypse have become all-too-believable threats. The images of nuclear holocausts or technogenic pandemics today coexist with the

realities of mass extinction, climate change, soil degradation, and the list goes on.

An argument can be made that such massive destruction is not so much the unfortunate side-effect of triumphant technological civilization as it is its inevitable and progressive outcome, the result of psychological and archetypal dynamics intrinsic to society's current unconscious mythos. If so, this is not the limit of human nature, but rather the limits conditioned by modernity's history and culture; for the mode of modernity—that is, disenchanted material-rationalism—has by no means been the universal human mode. Prior to modernity, the predominant mode of humanity has been intimate personal involvement with a natural world perceived as deeply ensouled—filled, that is, with gods of ecology whose existence and relations were profoundly implicated in the harmonies of the community of ecological life, and therefore also in human lives. This is the original mode of humanity, which Lévy-Bruhl (1912/1926) called the *participation mystique*.

This term is the origin for the various uses of “participation” and “participatory” that have already come up. What is participatory is, in this sense, linked to the mode of human experience that predates the process of disenchantment. Yet, portrayals of such a mode as primitive, savage, and

superstitious, portrayals of which even Lévy-Bruhl (1910/1926) was guilty, betray the strong and unfortunately widespread biases of secular modernity. One can see—in the journey from Christendom’s suppression of paganism into the Victorian biases of Sir James Frazer (1890/1994) and finally into the secular biases of Lévy-Bruhl (1912/1926)—how continuously the evolving forces of modernity have waged a campaign against the ancient cultures of ecological participation. It is surely a tribute to the regenerative powers of the gods of ecology that their symbols and memories have survived at all.

Part of the bias of modernity has been to caricature “primitive” civilizations as incapable of rationality, creating a false dichotomy between the rationalism of modernity and the “superstition” of “primitives.” As Hanegraff (2003) wrote, Lévy-Bruhl’s anthropology “tended to overemphasize the connection between participation and ‘primitive’ cultures, on the one hand, and between causality and modern culture, on the other” (p. 373). In other words, traditional people have never had a general problem with rationality—for why would they? Rationality is a useful capacity that has surely been around at least as long as the human cerebral cortex, and as Hanegraff (2003) put it, “there is no reason why ‘magical’ participation’

would prevent persons from relying on instrumental causality while fishing or hunting” (p. 375).

It is modernity, in other words, that has declared war on nonrational modes of experience—not the other way around. Of course, in spite of this war, modernity has never achieved anything even remotely close to a purely rational existence. In Evans-Pritchard’s (1965) words:

We [moderns] are, for the most part, non-logical.

Theology, metaphysics, socialism, parliaments, democracy, universal suffrage, republics, progress, and what have you, are quite as irrational as anything primitives believe in, in that they are the product of faith and sentiment, and not of experiment and reasoning. ...

We may be a little more critical and sensible than we used to be, but not so much as to make a big difference. (p. 97)

What becomes apparent is that the rational and the nonrational—the modern and the participatory—are not two types of irreconcilable cultures, but are rather two alternate capacities that are always available within the human experience. Hanegraff (2003) referred to this as the capacity for participation and *instrumental causality*, respectively, describing both as examples of a “spontaneous tendency of the human mind” (p. 375). In this sense, any attempt to choose one

of these capacities over the other is an imposed dichotomy and a denial of holism itself—an amputation of human psychology and potentials.

By this same token, it should be clear that rationality is no more a fundamental problem than enchantment is—or, rather, that either mode can be problematic if performed in problematic ways. Just as some enactments of “enlightenment” may be more holistically enlightened than others (see Ferrer, 2017, so one could point out that not all forms of “enchantedness” are identical; indeed, not all are desirable. Cruel forms of occultism—the shamanic cannibals and Crowley-esque cultists and the Nazi esotericists of history—have certainly existed alongside cruel forms of rationalism. Part of the value of an archetype and an ancient tradition is that it offers a time-tested path into a mythos that has been seasoned by nature’s slow wisdom and that is not so easily hijacked by human greed or ambition.

Regardless, one cannot really separate either rationality or participation from the human condition. For the mode of instrumental causality excels at explaining how things happen, while the mode of participation is an immersion into the question of why things happen, and humans clearly depend on a grasp of both. This dependence is so strong that even in the midst of the secular monoculture and its rationalist ideology,

participation remains sovereign within the realms of poetry, music, art, spirituality, and even experience itself. In this sense, it is clear that all societies and indeed each human life involves the practice of both modes. Thus, as Hanegraff (2003) described, what creates modernity's secular disenchantment is not actually superior rationality but rather

the development in modern history of "instrumental causality" *as an ideology*: the project of establishing a complete worldview based upon a theory (or set of theories) claiming exclusive truth and sufficiency with respect to all dimensions of reality. What is historically unique in modern history is not anything like the victory of causality over participation (or logic over pre-logic thinking, rationality over irrationality, science over magic, and so on). Unique is merely the phenomenon that this particular ideological system has managed, as the outcome of a complex series of contingent social and cultural developments, to establish itself in recent history as the socially dominant symbolic system in western society. (pp. 375-376)

What is essentially at stake in the question of re-enchantment is not a choice between rational and nonrational capacities, but a choice between an ideology that attempts to

amputate the nonrational versus a holism that uplifts the full range of human experience. The goal of re-enchantment, then, is not opposed to rationality—for not even original participatory cultures were opposed to the rational; the entire dichotomy is a construction of modern disenchantment. In Hanegraff's (2003) words:

Disenchantment is, firstly, based upon the internalization (by means of socialization) of this particular ideology of 'instrumental causality', including its claims of exclusiveness and sufficiency. The result is an acute tension with participation. In other cultures and historical periods, participation and instrumental causality may exist side by side without causing any major problem (except, occasionally, for the odd philosopher). (p. 376)

While modernity's myopia of instrumental causality has proven to be technologically powerful, it has also proven to be ecologically destructive and relationally imbalanced. Thus, re-enchantment is indicated as an embrace of the whole range of human powers—that is, not anti-rationalism, but rationality alongside an embodied, intimate, and more-than-rational involvement with the world and the mythic imagination of the wild soul. This is, as Ferrer (2017) put it: "a blend of epistemological boldness and humility that embraces the

potential value of different epistemic frameworks, while concurrently acknowledging the limits of the analytic rationality cultivated in the modern West” (p. 54).

What emerges, then, is that re-enchantment—the opening of contemporary mythos beyond the secular monoculture—and holism—the opening of the full range of human capacities of perceiving, knowing, and interacting—arrive together, hand in hand. The goal is not to diminish the value of reason or rational knowing, but only to liberate from an epistemological tyranny that has trapped modernity within a prison of a singular mode. For the Green Man, as subsequent chapters illuminate, is a great proponent of liberation, and particularly of the liberation of embodied human consciousness as it leaps toward its possibilities of holistic actualization. For this to become possible, first the chains must be shaken off and the prison bars rent asunder—as they were by the earthquake that set free the imprisoned Dionysius of Euripides’s (405 B.C.E./1990) *The Bacchae*—so that this ancient dance of humanity and wilderness can begin to move in ecstasy once more.

Music, Madness, and the Art of Research

Nonrationality may seem “mad” from the viewpoint of dogmatic rationalism, but its necessity for humankind is made quite clear by the universal need for art, which has never for a

moment vanished even within the most fundamentalist bastions of modernity. As Hanegraff (2003) put it:

The possibility of art functioning as an “enclave” for participation in a disenchanted world ... reflects a deep-seated feeling that, somehow, the language of myth and poetry is more than just beautiful, but must convey something about the real nature of the world. (p. 377)

Thus, like scholarship, art is not simply a personal activity but a social function. Just like science, art is a conversation with existing knowledge and history—so the comparison I have already made between scholars and artists is one that goes in both directions. Artists are also, in a sense, researchers involved in a dialogical process of culture constellating its own psyche. When understood this way, one might say that like painting or music, research too is a domain of culture-making, a specific noble art.

This would be, in any case, a Dionysian perspective on research. If the Green Man were to don lab coat and spectacles, becoming a scholar, what shape would his research take? As the Lord of the Dance, archetypal rockstar, patron of theater, I imagine that the Green Man’s research would also be a cultural performance, his method an artform, his attitude like that of improvisational music.

For I would argue that the Green Man is not simply a historical image found carved in wood or stone, but rather is an archetypal patterning appearing in diverse dimensions of cosmos and consciousness—in nature, in history, in dreams, in art. If one understands archetypes thus, then there is no essential distinction to be made between sculpture, music, dance, scholarship, and so on—for any cultural medium, like any form of matter, may carry the melodies and messages of an archetype's emergence from psyche. As Anderson (1990) described it:

We think of the Green Man as a visual image, as an object sculpted in stone or carved in wood, but the emotions he expresses transcend their form and their vitality is equally powerful when transmitted through the dance or the dramatic rituals of folk custom and in rhythms and melodies of poetry and song. (p. 18)

Music, poetry, and dance, in particular, have been linked to the Green Man's archetypal transmissions, particularly in their folk appearances—more on the town green than in the chamber hall. Music, if truly beheld, is an extraordinarily magical phenomenon—almost definitively so. The depth of meaning in a wordless melody can carry more profundity than a sacred sermon or text. Every religion has created its own

musical styles to carry its deepest feelings and epiphanies—and if religions have created music, then isn't it possible that music, too, has created religion?

For we cannot doubt that this, the most intimate and affecting of all the arts, has done much to create as well as to express the religious emotions, thus modifying more or less deeply the fabric of belief to which at first sight it seems only to minister. The musician has done his part as well as the prophet and the thinker in the making of religion. Every faith has its appropriate music, and the difference between the creeds might almost be expressed in musical notation. The interval, for example which divides the wild revels of Cybele from the stately ritual of the Catholic Church is measured by the gulf which severs the dissonant clash of cymbals and tambourines from the grave harmonies of Palestrina and Handel. A different spirit breathes in the difference of the music. (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 319)

Those “wild revels of Cybele” belonged to the fertility traditions (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 319), for as discussed in Chapter 6, Cybele was a Great Goddess figure—found alongside her Green Man partner, Attis—in certain regions of the Mediterranean. Perhaps such wild revels of the gods of ecstasy

are to be found again in the creative surge of modern music, with the rise of Jazz and Blues and their prodigal wild-child Rock & Roll. When Elvis began to shimmy his hips, when the Beatles and the Rolling Stones sang of psychedelic insights, surely the Green Man was rocking out with them, shaking at the foundations of whatever cathedrals were built to cover over his presumed grave.

In the 21st century, Del Rey continues to croon about the black depths and the melancholy blues, and of her lover who is “born to lose” (2015), evoking the same ancient mythos of the ever-dying gods of romance and sacrifice. Prominent performers sometimes flat-out call for revolution from their spot-lit stages. Like the bards, minstrels, and fools of old, rock stars move with the Dionysian aegis upon them, as if guarded by some collective feeling that someone, anyone should be free to express the repressed undercurrents that move beneath. And so, in Otto’s (1965) words:

From these depths comes music—Dionysiac music—which transforms the world in which life had become a habit and a certainty, and death a threatening evil. This world it obliterates with the melody of the uncommon which mocks all attempts at reassurance. (p. 140)

This is tragedy—nonrational, romantic, soulful, mad. It does not seem to make much rational sense. In subsequent chapters, I recount the recurrent myths of Green Man figures who have drowned themselves in watery depths rather than be caught by pursuing mobs. How should rational measurement account for the music that defies reckoning or the tragedy that dies before capture? Such tragedy returns us directly into confrontation with modernity's obsession over control.

If insanity seems present here, I would argue that it isn't because the nonrational is insane, but because modernity has been built on an image of sanity based on a fundamental falsehood. This is the falsehood at the ecocidal foundations of modern civilization itself—it is the tragically collapsing ground that is revealed by "the lifting of the veil," the literal meaning of the Greek word *apocalypse*. Beneath the illusion of control is the Dionysian: the mystical, mad, and ecological wilderness that is also the realm of the gods of ecstasy.

Tragedy is fundamental to the Dionysian, for the mythos is profoundly connected with the furthest reaches of psyche's wilderness: those of death itself. Humanity's intimacy with the existential wilderness has broadly decayed across the last several thousand years of history, gradually displaced or driven underground by emerging civilization's aversion to anything not

under rational control. While slowly erasing the memory of the participatory mode that preceded it, while expanding the reach of the domesticated countryside, the fantasy of civilization has subconsciously imagined that it might, eventually, master even that most untamable wilderness of all: death. Unfortunately, it is precisely such hubris of immortality that seems to constellate the titanic death forces that now loom across the ecology of the Earth. Thus, the specter of apocalyptic collapse may finally, now, be piercing civilization's immortality fantasy—a bitter prospect for a people long invested in the premise that life's wilderness, uncontrolled, is so unbearable that any price must be paid for its conquest.

For what? The collapse of the control fantasy forces the contemporary psyche to begin asking this question. Profoundly repressed and implicated in bloody repression, disenchanted and trapped in materialism, aware of the horrors of history unfolding, the modern human struggles for a satisfying answer to how one might justify existence at all, and especially human existence, and especially the modern human's strange and destructive life on Earth. Without a good answer, all manner of psychic numbing—addiction, dissociation, depression, overconsumption—become ways to manage the pain of meaninglessness, which is actually a pain of disconnection from

the participatory ecology that has always been humanity's original home.

Such numbing can be considered a form of psychic suicide. In this sense, at the heart of ecological devastation and other potentially world-destroying events, I imagine a collective death wish stemming from the very logic of civilization's own foundational fantasy, which states: I will fight, I will kill, I will enslave, I will do anything, to defy and overcome my sense of vulnerability in the face of life and death. And if I cannot have my way, if I must face this wilderness on its terms, I would rather take it with me into destruction, for I would rather die fighting for the vision of a world under my control than surrender to the fact that it is not.

As an alternative to such a dubious "sanity"—music, madness, and mysticism have been entwined in the Dionysiac forest since time immemorial, and such forces still thrive in the midst of modernity, expressed as art. As Otto (1965) wrote: "The deep emotion in which this madness announces itself finds its expression in music and dance" (p. 143). Art is crazy, dance is crazy, music is crazy—it is nonrational, and does not answer to the rational account, and of course that which deviates from the rational account is, by modernity's definitions, crazy.

Thus, the constant low-grade cultural rebellion of artists through history makes a kind of inevitable sense—for this persistence of the nonrational through art has an almost vegetal quality, like vines cracking through pavement. I suggest that such a vegetal quality, a Dionysian quality, is an archetypal image of the regenerative power of both ecology and psyche, which appears in the artist as a kind of “madness” that may be just what is indicated for the renewal of modernity’s own autochthonous fertility.

A deeper inquiry into the nature of such fertile madness—why does music move us so?—could surely never be answered by a purely rational method. Reductionism would reduce the mystery that it touches. How can language define the meaning of music? Mythopoetics are a kind of compromise: an attempt to communicate with and about the ineffable in a language that is also poetry, also performative, also participatory, and thus closer to the musical mode—what Hillman (1989) termed “cosmic speech” (pp. 228-230).

In recognition of this connection between music, mythopoetics, and the ongoing dance of the gods of ecstasy through time, I begin every chapter of this work with the lyrics of a song. This is a small acknowledgement of the fact that creative scholarship is, like a song, an engagement with the

living culture of a people—for scholarship that departs from the dogma of material-rationalism must become something quite different than a dry pretense at objectivity. It must become, instead, a work of art, an animal cry, a form of beauty, a creative participation in the “mad” dance of culture.

As the phenomenon of empire collapses under its own weight, I believe that the time has come for such transformations—and to judge by the evolving voices of the artists and scholars whom I behold in culture-making, I am far from alone in this intuition. As Lennon (1971) sang, “You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one.” To illustrate the point, as I draft this passage, English songwriter Seal (1991) is crooning from my speakers: “We’re never gonna survive unless we get a little crazy.” After this, I recall another song of the same title, and I put it on, so that Gnarles Barkley (2006) chimes in:

Who do you think you are?
Hahaha, bless your soul
You really think you’re in control?
Well, I think you’re crazy
I think you’re crazy
I think you’re crazy
Just like me

A Brief Outline

Subsequent chapters proceed in a roughly chronological order, which unfolds on two fronts. Firstly, the primary

historical and anthropological content, found in Chapters 3–6, begins in the period of Early Sumer and proceeds sequentially through the major developmental phases of Sumerian myth and culture. Chapter 5 completes this review of the Sumerian fertility mythos with an exegesis of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Chapter 6 connects the Sumerian tradition through its successors in Mesopotamia and into the Near East, and eventually into the beginnings of the Classical Mediterranean period. This completes the scope of the review. Throughout, comparative and archetypal analysis of motifs and themes fleshes out some of the deeper meanings apparent within the ancient traditions.

The second form of chronology within the work is found within Chapters 2 and 7, which besides framing the analysis with a discussion of methods and conclusions, also frames the research within another kind of historical journey—that of my own experience as I have been drawn into these myths and traditions across the decades of my life. This research has been more than a scholarly undertaking; it has also been a profound personal and transformative journey of my own humanity within times of extreme personal, cultural, and ecological confusion.

In the end, I have discovered that the findings and significance of this research cannot be divided from my own

transformation as a human being. For the Green Man, at least as I have come to understand archetypes, is not found only in some ancient past or some distant virgin forest; he dwells among us, touching lives.

CHAPTER 2: HILLMANIAN HERMENEUTICS

If memory serves us, then who is the master?
And how do we know who's projecting this reel? ...
It's all in the hands of a lazy projector
A forgetting, embellishing, lying machine
(Bird, 2012)

Method Beyond Objectivity and the Hermeneutic Mind

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the corpus of the late depth psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011) would be taken as the primary psychological guide to the archetypal approach found in this work. Trained as a Jungian analyst—indeed, in part by Jung himself—Hillman served as the director of studies at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich from 1959 to 1969. Ultimately, Hillman's unique heterodox thought led to increasing distance from classical Jungian positions and eventually to his identification with a post-Jungian psychology (c.f. Russell, 2013).

Hillman was a clinician and popular author. While he could fairly be called a philosopher as well as psychologist, he

was not a scientific researcher, and he never articulated a precise method for his inquiries. He was, however, very explicit about his philosophical reasoning and the praxis of his clinical work—and these musings provide a rich ground for a methodological elaboration of a Hillmanian approach. That elaboration is the intent of this chapter.

To begin, let us first consider: what is a research method? Most purely, method is the means by which a researcher attempts to see into their work. Whether this is microscopic observation, statistical data analysis, or qualitative inquiry depends on the field and on the researcher. In practice, it also depends a great deal on politics, for method can also be regarded as a primary justification for the validity of any research. This has become the case because method is the primary manner through which science has come to justify itself as a privileged domain. Method, one might say, is what separates scientific assertion from the common realm of sundry opinion. Method, as an idea, is therefore worth attending to more closely as a fundamental assumption of science itself.

The idea of method largely arose in the physical sciences, especially chemistry (c.f. Principe, 2015). In the chemistry lab, method is literal measurement—it is instrumentation and instructions to operate those instruments. Efficacy of research

in this setting depends on standardization and replicability—that is, insofar as possible, the unique human researchers are to be removed from the equation such that findings might be universal and objective. This approach appears to have served very well for the advancement of the physical sciences. On the other hand, the application of the same approach to understanding thought, behavior, culture, symbolism, and so on, has been a far more dubious project.

Yet whether dubious or not, instrumental rationality, as discussed in the previous chapter, operates within modernity as an ideology—and thus scientific symbolism has become not only a matter of science, but also a matter of cultural cachet. This phenomenon can be termed *scientism*—use of the ideology and symbols of “science” to align with the dogma of instrumental rationality, which due to the power of political and social expediency, has come to reach far beyond the chemistry lab, penetrating even into such fields as psychology, philosophy, and the humanities. As Evans (1988) put it, “As with dogmatic Marxism in communist countries, positivism and analytic philosophy have become a kind of established religion in many of the philosophy departments of Anglo-American universities. The effect has been to dampen philosophical ingenuity and innovative thinking” (p. 196).

This is not a new issue—indeed, these political dimensions are much older than the 18th-century Enlightenment to which they have often been traced. The dialectic reaches back at least to the Greek Enlightenment of Athens. As Goldhill (2004) described, the use of a positivistic attitude to claim intellectual authority over and against mythopoetic traditions is found as early as the 5th century B.C.E., in which

these new forms of [abstract and positivist] intellectual activity began as radical innovations, and were immediately seen by more conservative forces as threatening. Each of these new disciplines, as they fought to become established, needed to distinguish their own authority. One key rhetorical strategy for each discipline was to disparage or diminish its opponents by calling them purveyors of myth. “Myth” becomes the name of what these new disciplines *don’t* do. “What I offer,” claims one physical scientist, “is a true picture of the world scientifically observed and described. I can tell you how the physical world works. These old stories about how things came to be, they are just myths.” Myth can no longer mean simply an inherited story of the old days, let alone an authoritative tale. Now “myth” is opposed to true “history.” Or it is something to be dispelled by real

“philosophy.” Or replaced by objective “science.” This negative colouring, which develops during the fifth-century Enlightenment, still tinges the concept of “myth” today: we still say “mere myth,” “just a myth.” With final dismissiveness, myth has come to mean a silly or pernicious tale whose false enticements you should beware. (p. 312)

The positivist attitude of “objectivity,” in other words, was being used as a political bid for cultural cachet long before the methods of science had gotten off the ground. That is to say: “objectivity” has been, from its very inception, tied up with a rhetorical rejection of myth and mythic thinking.

Where, then, does this leave the field of depth psychology? Depth psychology is a field that emerges directly out of the depths of myths—yet the allure of positivistic cachet, and the cost of ignoring it, is so strong that even the founders of depth psychology have tended to adopt a kind of scientistic-mythic compromise. As Hillman (1975) put it, both Freud and Jung “attempted with their works to give us a positive knowledge of the psyche” (p. 193). Hillman (1975), on the other hand, diverged from such compromises, seeing the positivistic approach as intrinsically destructive to the meanings carried within the soul depths of myth and nature: “When we believe we

know the invisible, we begin on a ruinous course. We are now reaping the ignorant delusions of the last century's positive knowledge of nature" (p. 193).

Interestingly, while rationalists and materialists may dismiss such mythopoetic approaches as unscientific, Hillman's (1975) rejection of positivism in depth psychology can also be seen as a more philosophically rigorous approach than that of those who attempt "a positive knowledge of the psyche" (p. 193). As Evans (1988) put it: "By denying their own metaphysical biases, positivists and philosophical analysts were less intellectually forthright than the idealists they criticized, since the latter frankly acknowledged that *every* system of human thought begins with certain unproven definitions and postulates" (p. 196). Hillmanian psychology, similarly, never pretends at anything like definitive positive knowledge, seeing such pretense as philosophically untenable.

Such a position finds support in the observations of phenomenology and radical empiricism, and indeed as Casey (2016) noted, Hillman's closest contemporary philosophical relatives are found in William James's radical empiricism and in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology—Hillman's motto of "stick to the image" can itself be considered "a call for phenomenological description" (Casey, 2016, pp. 18–20).

However, whereas some phenomenologists may attempt an *epoche*—identification and bracketing of one’s perceptual situation so as to approximate a neutral objectivity—Hillman (1981/2013a) was skeptical of the idea that one could ever even approximate “setting aside or bracketing out in order to move directly to the event itself” (p. 32). In Hillman’s (1981/2013a) view, there can be no neutral zone for perception; one might move around between perceptual lenses, but one can never go beyond them, for perception is always conditioned by imagination—which is to say, by archetype: “If imagining is the native activity of the *anima mundi*, then fantasy is always going on and is not subject to a phenomenological *epoche*” (p. 32).

Therefore, rather than seeing fantasy as subject to *epoche*, Hillman (1986/2016d) saw *epoche*—like all attempts at objectivity—as an archetypally situated event, for: “All descriptions of complexes are themselves metaphors conditioned by the root metaphors of the complexes themselves. There is no way out: we are never free from Imagination” (p. 294). For this reason, instead of accepting phenomenological *epoche* or any claim at even the approximation of objectivity, Hillman (1981/2013a) would be inclined to ask what archetypal perspective imagines itself as capable of perceiving “phenomena as they are” (p. 32). In other words, in facing

claims of objectivity or certain knowledge, the Hillmanian (e.g., 1981/2013a) move is to inquire as to the god behind the objectivism itself: the nature of the fantasy that would imagine certain knowledge.

To put this more generally, Hillman's (1981/2013a) psychology is rooted in what he termed a *poetic basis of mind*, which is characterized by the fact that

"fantasy" and "reality" change places and values. First, they are no longer opposed. Second, fantasy is never merely mentally subjective, but is always being enacted and embodied ... Third, whatever is physically or literally "real" is always also a fantasy image. Thus the world of so-called hard factual reality is always also the display of a specifically shaped fantasy, as if to say, along with Wallace Stevens ... there is always "a poem at the heart of things."
(p. 31)

Such poetic knowing is not to be limited only to psychological or mythic knowledge—nor limited even to the humanities and "soft sciences"—for again, to paraphrase Hillman (1981/2013a): all perception is conditioned by imagination. Interestingly, reputed Assyriologist and historian Jacobsen (1976) described something very similar in regards to the objective knowing of history, advocating the adoption of a

similarly poetic and intuitive sensibility in seeking to understand the cultures of the ancients:

Ultimately, the coherence of our data must be our guide.

True meanings illuminate their contexts and these contexts support each other effortlessly. False meanings jar, stop, and lead no further. It is by attention to such arrests, by not forcing, but by being open to and seeking other possibilities, that one may eventually understand—recreate, as it were—the world of the ancients. For the world of the ancients was, as all cultures, an autonomous system of delicately interrelated meanings, in which every part was dependent on every other part and ultimately meaningful only in the total context of meaning of the system to which it belonged. Understanding it is not unlike entering the world of poetry. (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 19)

It is interesting to consider that this kind of poetic intelligence may be just as necessary for the skillful historian as it is for the interpreter of myth and dream—and that in either case, such poetic sensitivity may be just as key to the scholar's work as their rational faculties. This compels the question: what kind of knowing, exactly, does one find in the poet? Poetic knowing is certainly not objective, nor is it literal, nor perhaps is

it even realist. What is the use of knowledge that isn't even, in this sense, real? Hillman (1981/2013a) put it thus: the well-trained mythopoetic mind endeavors constantly with a "metaphorical perspective ... [that] brings about the death of naïve realism, naturalism, and literal understanding. ... It delivers all things to their shadows" (p. 29).

The death of realism is an important aspect of this art because it makes room for a knowing of soul phenomena on their own terms. In the same manner that dreams can only begin when the waking mind sleeps, so it is that a deeper encounter with soul lies beneath the literal understanding of phenomena. In Hillman's (1975) terms: "Essential for working with what is unknown is an attitude of unknowing. ... Hence my stress upon two things: the dark eye that makes our brightness unsure; and careful precision in regard to what is actually there" (p. 194).

The first task of the depth psychologist must therefore be to know that "we can never be purely phenomenal or truly objective. One is never beyond the subjectivism given with the soul's native dominants of fantasy structures" (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 32). The depth psychologist depends, therefore, on this "dark eye that makes our brightness unsure" (Hillman, 1975, p. 194). Drawing on Jung (1954/1985), who wrote that "to

understand the dream's meaning [one] must stick as close as possible to the dream images" (p. 149), which may itself have been a callback to Husserl's (1900/2001) early battle-cry of phenomenology: "Back to the things themselves!" (p. 168). This is the general approach that Hillman (1975), in turn, described as "sticking to the image ... [which] leaves room for the phenomenon itself to speak" (p. 194).

While a poetic basis of mind is a radical departure from the positivism that has come to dominate much of the post-Enlightenment West, one should note that it is not a new idea at all, but rather an extremely old one. As participatory cultures—steeped in myth—predated the modern ideology of instrumental causality, so a mythic and poetic perspective like Hillman's seems closer to the way that the vast majority of human cultures have thought about things throughout time—closer, in other words, to many indigenous understandings of what it means to know and to speak knowledge. As Bird-David (1999/2002) described this distinction:

If the object of modernist epistemology is a totalizing scheme of separated essences, approached ideally from a separated viewpoint, the object of this animistic knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related

viewer. Knowledge in the first case is having, acquiring, applying, and improving representation of things in-the-world. ... Knowledge in the second case is developing the skills of being in-the-world with other things, making one's awareness of one's environment and one's self finer, broader, deeper, richer, etc. Knowing, in the second case, grows from and is maintaining relatedness with neighboring others. (p. 96)

The challenge to objectivity given by such indigenous worldviews is rooted in the dense and inescapable aliveness of intersubjective ecology. This is notably distinct from a Kantianism that holds reality as unknowable due to an unbridgeable separation between mind and matter (c.f. Ferrer & Sherman, 2008). In contrast, this indigenous view holds final and definitive knowledge as impossible precisely because the mind is profoundly immersed in a relational life world that is constantly changing. As Abram (1997) put it, while we humans can consciously transform the nature of our participation, we "can never suspend the flux of participation itself" (p. 59). This helps to shed some light on the question of the nature of poetic knowledge—for poetry is not observation of the world from some place apart from it; rather, through poetry, the poet actively participates and engages with their life and ecology,

much as birdsong is a form of the bird's participation in living. This kind of knowing—whether called participatory, poetic, or indigenous—is thus not a separated act of definitive knowledge, but can rather be described as we humans actively propelling of our awareness “laterally, outward into the depths of a landscape at once both sensuous and psychological, the living dream that we share with the soaring hawk, the spider, and the stone silently sprouting lichens on its coarse surface” (Abram, 1997, p. 10).

While Hillman preferred to root his primary sources in the Western tradition, building a psychology that could be considered endemic to modernity's own cultural roots, these parallels between Hillmanian views and indigenous thought are nevertheless worth noting. In part, such parallels are rooted in the fact that the ancient, mythic, and polytheistic sources on which Hillman drew can, in their own right, be considered as a form of indigenous thought. It is interesting, for example, to compare the kinds of descriptions of indigenous knowing given above—such as Abram's (1997) “flux of participation” (p. 59)—with the philosophy of an ancient Greek mystic like Heraclitus. Heraclitus, too, asserted that the phenomenal world was a constantly changing flux, which he likened to the endless flickering of a universal flame or cosmic fire (see Hillman,

2001/2016j). This serves as part of the philosophical basis for Hillman's rejection of objective knowing, for if everything is Heraclitean fire, "therefore the verbal account or *logos* of the world is also fire. Truth, wisdom, knowledge, reality—none can stand apart from this fire that allows no objective fixity" (p. 129). A Hillmanian rejection of objective knowledge, in other words, was based on the same kind of worldview of processual participation as that of indigenous and mythic ways of knowing, and was indeed based on mythic ways of knowing as drawn from the ancient Greeks.

Besides James Hillman, the other primary philosophical source I have named is that of Jorge Ferrer's (2017) participatory thought—which is itself notably based on the notion of knowledge as *cocreatively enactive*. These terms originally emerged out Varela et al.'s (1991) landmark work of cognitive science, in which *enaction* describes a process by which all living beings in some sense cocreate their realities through the development of novel perceptual and creative capacities in dynamic codetermination with their environments. For example, one might ask, did the color blue meaningfully exist before the first optic nerves were able to detect it and differentiate it from other colors—that is, before it mattered to the experience of some form of consciousness? In the sense of

reality as enactive, the answer would probably be, “not really.” That is to say, within an enactive cosmos, reality is not so much a singular preexisting structure as an emergent multiverse of perception and possibility.

While Varela et al. (1991) developed these concepts purely within the domains of natural biology and ecology, Ferrer’s (2017) participatory philosophy effectively “extends the enactive paradigm ... to account for the emergence of ontologically rich religious realms, which are cocreated by human multidimensional cognition and the mystery or generative force of life or the cosmos” (p. 274). The participatory paradigm has, in other words, perceived spiritual and religious concepts —“subtle worlds or domains of distinction” (p. 296)—as real in the same sense that newly arising colors within an enactive cosmos can be understood as real—that is, as “cocreated by human multidimensional cognition and the generative force of life or the mystery” (p. 296).

Upon a closer look, it becomes clear that such understandings of participatory enaction closely parallel the previously described mythic and indigenous ways of perceiving “the flux of participation” (Abram, 1997, p. 59), as well as Hillman’s (2001/2016j) “fire that allows no objective fixity” (p. 129). For in each such epistemology, cosmos is seen as a fluid

becoming that emerges from a kind of cocreative conversation with consciousness, and knowledge is therefore not an objective account but rather a form of activity that is itself reality-creating. Such an understanding—which unites the ideas of Ferrer (2017), Hillman, ancient participatory cultures, and many more—turns out to be a common thread for a great many of the ideas in this work.

Besides each of these traditions, there is one more root that must be mentioned as an epistemological source for this research: the mythic image of the Green Man himself. In fact, the Green Man as a symbol of participatory, poetic, and enactive knowing has been observed before—as Anderson (1990) put it, the Green Man as leaf-mask “can be seen as uttering the Logos as foliage” (p. 100). What does it mean if the Green Man is “uttering the Logos”? Firstly, *logos* is itself a complex mythic and theological category—it enfolds ideas of knowledge, speech, and cosmic creation, and is a reference point for the notion of the divine word as the original creative act. In this sense, *logos* would seem to relate to notions of poetic and enactive knowing as already described: something very near to, in Hillman’s (1989) terminology, “cosmic speech” (pp. 228–230).

In the light of the powers of such cosmic speech, one might note that Dionysius, whom I have already named as the

primary Greek manifestation of the archetype of the Green Man, was not only a god of vegetal growth but also of prophecy and poetry. Prophecy is, of course, a form of divine word, wherein speech and the destiny or destination of reality become intertwined—and the etymological root of poem is *poesis*, which means creation. Given such associations, it is striking that Weston (1920/1997) noted Logos as rooted in the tradition of the Green Man since at least the time of the Early Christians, who perceived Logos as tied up with the vegetal god Attis, a near-Eastern cousin of Dionysius, such that

when Christianity came upon the scene it did not hesitate to utilize the already existing medium of instruction, but boldly identified the Deity of Vegetation, regarded as Life Principle, with the God of the Christian Faith. Thus, to certain of the early Christians, Attis was but an earlier manifestation of the Logos, whom they held as identical with Christ. (p. 192)

Such relations between the ancient tradition of the Green Man and the emergence of the Christ mythos are an extremely rich topic that exceeds the scope of this work—but to summarize here: the “Deity of Vegetation, regarded as Life Principle” (Weston, 1920/1997, p. 192) was linked from early times to theologies of Logos, that principle of divine speech that authors

creation—which one could also call *poesis*. Such a deity has been pictured often, as has already been described, with the motif of leaves and vines bursting forth from its mouth—thus, one may picture the speech that authors life, or as Anderson (1990) put it: “uttering the Logos as foliage” (p. 100).

With this image in mind, one comes to a very different sense of what it means to know something, to speak knowledge—and yet this different sense may be much closer to an original and indigenous sense of good knowledge, not as supposedly objective measurement but as something rather closer to poetry or prophecy: a relational act within an ecosystem. Effective knowledge, true knowledge, is knowledge that is life-giving—like the foliage that bursts forth from the Green Man’s mouth. To know and to speak, in other words, is a form of nurturing, cultivating, gardening—all of which are relational acts. With this in mind, one may consider Bird-David’s (1999/2002) description of ways of knowing amongst the Nayaka people of South India:

If “cutting trees into parts” epitomizes the modernist epistemology, “talking with trees,” I argue, epitomizes the Nayaka animistic epistemology. “Talking” is shorthand for two-way responsive relatedness with a tree—rather than “speaking” one-way to it—as if it could listen and understand. ... To “talk with a tree”—rather than “cut it

down”—is to perceive what it does as one acts towards it, being aware concurrently of changes in oneself and the tree. It is expecting response and responding, growing into mutual responsiveness and, furthermore, possibly into mutual responsibility. (p. 96)

What does it mean if knowledge is less a matter of objective measurement and more an action-in-the-world—like gardening, poetry, or prophecy? If such is accepted, it means for one that I can make no pretense at scientism, no claim at objective knowing. Rather, the epistrophic hermeneut must hold that every articulation of knowledge emerges from a particular point within an ecological—and, in Hillman’s (1981/2013a) terms, archetypal—cosmos. Imagination is woven throughout, with both personal and mythic perspective conditioning the entirety of the activity of knowing.

Because the hermeneut does not endeavor for objectivity, the situatedness of the researcher is not a problem—rather, it is a feature. That is to say, the particular consciousness of the researcher is actually the instrument of hermeneutic measurement itself, and it is an instrument that processually evolves through contact with the material of the research. It is in this sense that Gadamer (1960/1975) emphasized hermeneutics as *dialogical*—in reading and being read one

enters into a dialogue of meaning-making with the material, a “fusion of horizons” (p. 269). This dialogue between interpreter and text is the fundamental meaning of *hermeneutic circle*: an understanding that the interpreter is changed by encounter with the material, and that this informs both what material the researcher includes next and how the researcher will read that material in turn, which then further shapes the researcher, and so on. The process forms an evolutionary dialectic between researcher and work, “a conversation with the text” (p. 331), which is precisely what has the potential within it to give rise to something unexpected and new.

Like the intrepid journeying of the god Hermes—the etymological root of *hermeneutics*—such a coevolutionary process never truly ends. The true hermeneutic journey is, in this sense, a lifelong engagement that exceeds any specific project. Attempting to delineate influences on the work of the hermeneutic researcher quickly becomes inseparable from recounting the researcher’s full biography, for the truth is that adult encounters with scholarly texts only scratch the barest surface of influences on a scholar’s life and mind. Indeed, this insight goes further, for such influences exceed even the researcher’s whole life, and the body of symbols engaged by the work of the hermeneut is what Hillman (1981/2013a) would call

the *anima mundi*—that is, “the soul in the world, which is also the soul of the world” (p. 34). Such an ancient and evolving body of collective symbols and resonances links the work of the hermeneut to the distant past and future—*ars longa, vita brevis*—just as the gardener inherits seeds, labors over them, and passes their legacy on in turn.

The body of knowledge that I engage as a hermeneut is therefore much larger and more ancient than my own body and memories. My contact with this larger body is mediated by the teachings, symbols, dreams, texts, and interpretations that I receive and engage in turn. In this sense, the bounds of my own life and flesh are more porous than they first appear. Yet, it is also the case that my own flesh, my own memory, my own life experience, is the point at which I experientially enter into the soul of the world. This is my situatedness, which, while uniquely mine, also bridges me in turn into an experience of the collective.

With this in mind, my discussion of method proceeds into the next section with an overview of how I came into this inquiry—how the influences that have shaped this work have entered my life and shaped me. Surely this is part of poetic knowing, for this is part of what any good poet does: through deep engagement with the particulars, they communicate with and

about universals. Without the cloak of objectivity to obscure the point, it seems to me that another insight begins to emerge: namely, that to speak personally, vulnerably, accurately, may in fact have the potential to be most rigorous form of reporting available.

The Researcher's Journey

My research journey began, in part, with dreams. As a child, I was plagued by nightmares and supernatural terrors. Adults tend to dismiss such visions as childish imaginings—but this attitude is nonsensical, given that the real violence of the adult world is often far more disturbing and severe than the child is even capable of imagining. One might therefore say that acute nightmarish visions belong to the most alert of young people, who intuitively perceive into the hidden shadows of adult world. A child cannot intellectually understand the cruelties, sufferings, injustices, and hypocrisies of that world, but may nevertheless pick up on such dynamics, and nightmares are one place where these awarenesses can begin to emerge into the consciousness of the child's mind.

I lived most of my early years awash in such inexplicable terrors, while also going through the fracturing of my family in the form of divorce and ensuing repeated relocations, which also resulted in a lack of friends and constant bullying in always-

new schools and neighborhoods. At 10 years old, attempting to get a grip on these years of helplessness, I developed an interest in the occult. Occultism was my first encounter with the idea that power could arise from within, the idea that mastery of the inner experience was a possible path to mastery in the world. A 10-year-old with a library card is not to be underestimated, and I found a book on occult magic that included a number of exercises for developing focus and will—what amounted, more or less, to a meditation practice. I engaged these exercises diligently each day thenceforth, and while I never developed any obvious supernatural powers, this did—after about one year of practice—give rise to my first lucid dream.

To be more accurate, it gave rise to lucid nightmare. After all, I was not in it for some casual curiosity or experimentation, but rather engaged in a fierce battle against my own terror and helplessness—my lifelong nightmare. The lucidity I sought was a lucidity in the face of this nightmare, and I had found it. Thus began the work of expanding and stabilizing my lucidity: often playing the same nightmares again and again, cultivating awareness and equanimity, practicing that unique quality of attentive and nonattached focus that characterizes the lucid state. This dream practice was, more or less, my first doorway

into self-knowing and self-mastery, and it occupied much of my attention for the next 15 years.

There is a sense of existential brokenness that is probably found in the depths of every human being—yet certain children seem primed to experience this especially acutely from birth. Probably many modern psychopathologies can be traced to such feelings. There are various ways that sensitive beings compensate for overwhelming existences, and compensations may be more or less functional for self and society. It is far easier to construct such compensations than to seek out the source of one's existential alienation; it is easier to settle on some available scapegoat, whether that is the self—"There is something wrong with me"—or another person—"So-and-so destroyed my childhood"—or the whole family—"I was born into a broken family."

It is natural to start with these kind of theories, personal theories, for the world of personal relations is the most immediate experience of the child. Children who must theorize about their feelings of inexplicable wrongness naturally begin with what might be wrong in themselves, their families, their immediate environments. No doubt I was beginning to form such theories at three years old, when my mother discovered me standing in front of the bathroom door, banging my head

against the wood and repeating the refrain: “Mad, bad, sad. No glad here.”

What exactly was the three-year-old expressing with such a refrain? Was I sensing the acrimonious divorce that, unbeknownst to me, brewed between my parents? Or, to look deeper, should one say that it was the traumas and emotional wounds that my still-young parents carried, the specters still unresolved from their own childhoods, their lives? Of course, my parents’ traumas were not isolated events either—in which case, shouldn’t one say that what the three-year-old sensed was an intergenerational legacy of ancestral wounds and unspoken shame? Yet even such an ancestral account fails to capture the whole story, for my ancestry is inseparable from a tapestry of history, humanity, whole swathes of population and culture throughout the ages. The three-year-old, of course, knows none of this—cannot even adequately theorize about family. Sensing the wound, they can only bang their head against a wooden door and repeat something like like: “Mad, bad, sad. No glad here.”

By late childhood, still struggling to give meaning to this persistent feeling of wrongness, I had begun to form theories of my own personal and familial brokenness—which evolved a bit further in my early adolescence, when I finally began to wonder whether something might be broken in the wider world. This

intuition came into sharper focus around 13 years old, when I first read Daniel Quinn's (1992) *Ishmael*. The book—on ecology, history, and anthropogenic apocalypse—moved me powerfully, for I suddenly saw my life and my moment in a new context.

Quite suddenly, I was woken up to an immense hidden presence called “history,” and a compelling notion that something had gone wrong in the historical journey of humankind; somewhere along the way, humanity had gone out of balance with this other great force called nature. Thus, I decided that I wasn't going to become a research scientist or an engineer—in spite of an affinity and family legacy for sciences and invention—because as I saw it, the problem was not a technical one but rather involved something regarding this feeling of brokenness that was somehow linked not only to my personal and ancestral wounds, but also to what appeared to be a growing catastrophe in the midst of all humankind.

A bridge began to materialize in my teenage mind—a bridge between my personal nightmares and this collective terror, this specter of apocalypse that Quinn's (1992) *Ishmael* finally confirmed was not some figment of my imagination, but something really happening. Ecological disaster was real. Nuclear armageddon was possible. My personal experiences of shadow—introduced to me by a childhood full of fear, pain, and

nightmares—were joined suddenly into a vision of a collective shadow. “It is only a dream,” my parents—like many parents—had told me. “Go back to sleep.” Such comforts, though never very compelling, were dealt a final blow by my sighting of the terrible and awesome power of the shared dream and the shared nightmare.

It turns out that all of humanity struggles with its nightmares. Indeed, all of humanity is in need of deeper nightmare work—for as the indigenous, mythopoetic, and participatory epistemologies I have presented make clear, we are in some sense always in the dream—as Hillman (1981/2013a) explicitly contended—and our dreaming is cocreating reality. To be always in the dream means also to be always in the nightmare; thus, nightmare work within and without is a lifelong responsibility.

To take on such work willingly requires a quality sometimes called courage. At 17 years old, I was cast as the Cowardly Lion in a production of the *Wizard of Oz*. I have come to understand through the years how appropriate this casting was—for like the Cowardly Lion, I had been struggling with fear and jumping at shadows all my life, yet as the character shows, fear and courage are really two sides of the same coin. I have found that shadow work tends to be paradoxical in this way—as

if potentials are not so much realized in spite of one's limits, but rather grow precisely out of them: the Scarecrow seeking understanding was always full of insight, the Tin-Man who longed for romance was never really short of heart, and Dorothy was never without her home.

In my mid-20s, having been practicing lucid dreaming for 15 years, I began to grow very curious about other traditions that had developed such arts of imaginal consciousness into detailed forms. Shamanism, in particular, began to attract me. I eventually found my way to the teachings of Martín Prechtel (e.g., 1998, 1999, 2012), who had served as a shaman of the Tzutujil people of Guatemala before their culture was largely displaced by war and colonialism. Following this displacement, Prechtel wrote several books that have informed my own thinking—and he subsequently relocated to New Mexico and founded an oral wisdom school called Bolad's Kitchen, which I attended for a time.

One of the teachings that I recall from Bolad's Kitchen went something like this: a healthy human village can be understood as a network of shrines and temples. Each shrine and temple is a home for certain spirits or gods. To honor these spirits with proper shrines is important not necessarily because spirits are always benign—but rather because it is when placed

in its proper shrine that any force becomes *most* benign. Gods cannot be eliminated, cosmic forces cannot be killed, to suppress a god is simply to aggravate its worst tendencies. The wise approach to spirits, then, can only be harmonization through proper placement.

In fact, by the time I heard this idea from Prechtel, it had already become familiar to me in another guise. I was born into the Jewish heritage through my father's line, and while most of my family has been secular through the last several generations, my father found his way back into the heart of Judaism through involvement with the mystical Renewal movement and especially its cofounder, Rabbi Hanan Sills. Through the teachings of Rabbi Sills and my father, who served as the president of his synagogue, I was exposed to many of the most palatable and universalist aspects of Jewish Kabbalah, including notions of *tikkun olam*.

Tikkun olam is often taken to refer to Jewish social and political action, but its literal meaning is "repairing the world." As a mystical concept, *tikkun olam* was elaborated by the 16th-century esoteric rabbi Isaac Luria, who explained the concept based on an image of the shattering of the divine vessel. In Luria's terms, existence had once been whole and wholly divine—cosmos had been synonymous with God—until God, like a

glass vessel, had undergone a great shattering into scattered sparks of light, which were thus hidden throughout all creation. In the tradition of Lurianic Kabbalah, it is our task as human beings to recognize and gather the broken fragments or scattered sparks and raise them up into the light, restoring their divinity to the whole and thus healing the world: *tikkun olam*. (c.f. Schwartz, 2011; Matt, 1995).

This imagery has always spoken to me deeply. When I was 16 years old, I wrote my first song for piano and vocals—it was titled “Spark of the Divine.” For a child born with such an acute sense of existential brokenness—“Mad, bad, sad; no glad here”—a notion like the primordial shattering of God holds real mythic power. I described previously how a widening perspective and education can lead such a child to slowly shift from notions of wounding as personal toward collective, historical, and social theorizing. But perspective may expand further still: wounds of soul might be cosmic, cyclic, autochthonous to creation. The message of “Spark of the Divine,” written by a teenager struggling with depression and existence, is that life is filled with difficulty but also with beauty, and that it is the human task to remember the beautiful pieces into a whole, as one might piece together a broken rainbow.

Martín Prechtel, in his oral teachings, described the Tzutujil word for “shaman” as synonymous with “tracker” or “hunter”—because the shaman’s task is the hunting down of sickness and curses, which can also be understood as the hunting down of wayward spirits to rehome them correctly, to place them in their proper shrines. Lions, too, are hunters—a psychic practitioner whom I didn’t know once looked me in the eye and named me “The Wound Collector”—and it seems that my whole life has involved this hunting of nightmares, gathering of shadows, collecting of wounds. There has been some strange compulsion in my life and psyche to track whatever is wounded and displaced through cosmos and through dream, always seeking to understand what is most misunderstood and thus possibly to reclaim its power.

Nightmare shadow work, Tzutujil teachings, Lurianic Kabbalah—the path of shadow reclamation has come into my life again and again. It is not generally a very convenient or easy path—thus, one finds oneself searching for allies to help or traditions to ground. Yet, I am not a Tzutujil shaman nor do I truly even feel at home enough in the Jewish tradition to take on the mantle of a Kabbalist. Hence, it was not until I began my PhD studies at the age of 28 that I found a teacher and a tradition to call my own. In my case, this did not appear as a

living mentor, but rather in the form of the late James Hillman, who passed away several years before my graduate studies began but left behind a massive inheritance of texts. I spent nearly two years of my graduate studies working through Hillman's corpus, and it became in many ways the soil for my own psychological approach. While the Green Man may be the mythic figure who has been my guide and the subject of my inquiry, it is Hillman who has tutored me in the manner of seeing and thinking as a depth psychologist.

Hillman was a clinician, but was atypical in that the individual human was not his primary concern—rather, he was primarily concerned with the wounds and fixations of culture as a whole. Just as I have expressed the manner in which my own view of wounding has broadened through time, from the personal to the collective, from the specific to the cultural and eventually to the cosmic, so too did Hillman see individual psychopathology as a bridge into cultural and mythic realities that required a deeper attention and understanding (Hillman, 1981/2013a, 1990/2016h).

Hillman's work with individual clients might best be considered as only peripheral to this lifelong engagement with the healing of ideas, the restoration of mythos. This underlying effort of healing within the depths of the cultural psyche is what

Hillman (1981/2013a) called *therapeia*, and it is an approach that can be characterized by the rehoming of forgotten spirits, the restoration of lost pieces of soul. Thus, I found in Hillman's *therapeia* a mirror of something that had arisen within quite naturally within my own life: the work of reclaiming what has been lost in nightmare through the courage of the lucid dream.

Hillman's *Therapeia*

What is Hillman's *therapeia*? It is certainly not something defined solely as a professional encounter between therapist and patient. It is not necessarily even an event that occurs between people. *Therapeia* is, rather, an event that occurs within "soul" (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 15), a word that Hillman used more or less interchangeably with "psyche" and "anima." Soul, psyche, or anima, from the Hillmanian perspective, is not so much a substance or a realm as it is a dimension of perception available all the time. In Hillman's (1988/2016c) words, soul is

a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint towards things rather than a thing itself. ... [It is] the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy*—that mode which recognizes all realities as metaphorical. (p. 339)

This emphasis on metaphor is related to the kinds of mythopoetic and participatory epistemologies I have previously described. The imaginal mind, which links images in a sea of resonances and relationships, is understood here as something very near to the nature of soul. Borrowing from Jung (1967/1983), who said that “image *is* psyche” (p. 75), Hillman (1988/2016c) asserted that “psyche is basically an *image maker*, or an artist, or a poet” and that “*making images is actually making soul*” (p. 339). In the same way that Ferrer’s (2017) participatory enaction views spiritual perception and knowledge as cocreating reality, so Hillman viewed metaphoric depths as a dimensionality—the dimension of soul—available within all phenomena and accessible by the imagination, just as color is accessible by the visual faculties of the eye. To treat soul, then, is to engage such depths of metaphoric image—the same depths one engages through dream. With *therapeia*, then, Hillman’s (1986/2016d) true client was none other than “*imagination* [itself], presenting itself phenomenally in the many complexes” (p. 284).

Furthermore, because this imagination is carried culturally and collectively, the individual humans treated by psychotherapy might simply be the momentary channels of a far vaster and collective depth of meaning. In this sense, the

primary reality engaged by *therapeia* could be said to be the imagination itself—*mythos* itself—as a world and realm in its own right. As Hillman (1986/2016d) put it, *therapeia* is imagination’s own “self-recognition” (p. 298) as it occurs through deepening awareness of “reveries, images, and metaphors” (p. 299).

Such a “self-recognition” (Hillman, 1986/2016d, p. 298) of imagination is the underlying goal of Hillmanian therapeutic work with clients, but it is also an event that unfolds elsewhere, everywhere that the imagination plays, such as even when one is by oneself “in the single chair, alone with a book” (p. 299). In this sense, *therapeia* is simply one domain in which the imagination participates with itself, unfolding its own hidden potentials, whether through the individual or through collective culture or even beyond human realms altogether. Hillman (1994/2016q) thus asked, “Who is the person I encounter in my practice as a *cultural* phenomenon” (p. 218)? Eventually, Hillman (1991/2014f) ceased working with individual clients altogether, focusing entirely on “psychotherapy with large groups, in public speaking and teaching, publishing and writing” (p. 225).

It is into this broader sense of *therapeia* that I ground the intentions of a Hillmanian hermeneutic. As I have already

critiqued objectivity as the presumed arbiter of method, and as I have put forth ecological relationality as an alternative, so the groundwork has been laid for the Hillmanian hermeneutic as a fundamentally therapeutic activity—that is, hermeneutics as a *therapy of ideas* (Hillman, 1977). The “patient” of such a hermeneutic is not a human individual, but rather the lost pieces of mythos and fragments of symbols that one finds scattered and forgotten throughout culture and history. The therapeutic patient of the hermeneut is, in other words, the knowledge and imagination of the world, perceiving and unfolding itself through nature, culture, and time.

Hillman rarely wrote of his own life, but while his psychology may be described as polytheistic and archetypal, he was by birth a Jewish-American. His maternal grandfather was, in fact, Joseph Krauskopf, a prominent Rabbi who immigrated to the USA and played a leading role in the Jewish Reform Movement. While Rabbi Krauskopf passed away three years prior to his grandson’s birth and never met “Jimmy” Hillman, his illustrious memory was no doubt a significant presence in Hillman’s early life (c.f. Russell, 2013). Hillman’s first encounters with the notion of divine restoration were almost certainly—like my own—those of *tikkun olam*; indeed, Hillman made this link himself in a late-life interview, in which he

explicitly compared his *therapeia* with Lurianic ideas of *tikkun olam*:

When I say I do therapy of ideas, it is to repair bad ideas, broken ideas, forgotten ideas. That's an indirect way of restoring or repairing the world, though it isn't necessarily by social action. Also, the very idea that the world is broken, alienated from its source—although I don't follow the Jewish idea that its source is in God, but that it has fallen away from its archetypal and mythical sources, foundations. (as quoted in Russell, 2013, p. 224)

It seems that, as in my own case, such early encounters with the mysticism of *tikkun olam* remained nascent for Hillman until catalyzed by later encounters with other traditions and philosophers. Whereas I initially turned to indigenous shamanism and the work of Martín Prechtel (e.g., 1998, 1999, 2012), Hillman found his parallels amongst the ancient Greeks; thus, when he eventually formalized his approach to soul reclamation it was under the name of *epistrophē*, which Hillman (2007/2016o) attributed to the 5th-century Greek Neoplatonist Proclus as “the reversion or return of soul phenomena to the archetype, according to the principle of likeness or analogy” (p. 153).

It is interesting to compare indigenous and Neoplatonist praxes here—for while the Tzutujil defined shamans as “trackers” or “hunters,” so Proclean *epistrophē* appears to mean the use of imaginal perception to track specific phenomena to underlying archetypal patterns, which Hillman (1981/2013a) defined as “the primary forms that govern the psyche” (p. 13). To make full sense of this, it must be reiterated that “psyche” or “soul” is not something that only exists in the mind, in psychological interiority—it is rather to be considered as a dimensionality of phenomena themselves. When one performs *epistrophē*, then—using the imaginal eye and mythopoetic knowledge—one is tracking archetypal resonances and patterns in the world, for soul is found everywhere: “in physical, social, linguistic, aesthetic, and spiritual modes” (p. 13).

One sees, here, the close parallel with both *tikkun olam* and the kinds of village shamanism that Prechtel (personal communication) described. Such parallels are further reinforced by Hillman’s (2006/2016k) language of archetypal *whereness*, that is, “depth geography” (p. 368). Part of the praxis of cosmic homing must necessarily be a study of cosmic homes—that is, a topography of archetypes, a cartography of myth. In fact, the importance of proper placement in proper shrines appears to

have been as indigenous to the ancient Greeks as to other traditional peoples—as Hillman (1981/2013a) noted,

It was this question of *placing* that was addressed to the Greek oracles: “To what gods or hero must I pray or sacrifice to achieve such and such a purpose?” If one knows where an event belongs, to whom it can be related, then one is able to proceed. (p. 43)

Epistrophē is thus a form of the ancient art of placing.

Therapeia, then, can be considered as a form of healing through homecoming in which particular worldly phenomena are reunited with mythic roots through the perceptual act itself, imaginally restored by correct understanding to proper place and function. Thus, Hillman (2006/2016a) saw the crux of *therapeia* as organized around such questions as: “What does this phenomenon want to be? What is its intention? To what does it lead? What is it like? What does it like? Where can it find a home?” (p. 246). So it is that another definition of *epistrophē* can be given as “an epiphany of cosmic homing, a *therapeia* of soul” (Hillman, 2006/2016k, p. 369). Such “homes,” in the Neoplatonist tradition, are none other than the *archai*, the “*a priori* nature or imaginal reality” (Hillman, 2002/2016e, p. 316)—that is, the mythopoetic and metaphoric dimensionality of phenomena, as perceptible to the imaginal eye.

Of course, Hillman did not pull such Neoplatonist applications to psychology out of thin air. Rather, regarding the centrality of archetypalism in Hillman's (1981/2013a) thought, "Jung is recognized as the source but not the doctrine" (p. 13). Hillman was initially a Jungian, and Jung pioneered not only the contemporary use of the word "archetype" but also the contemporary resurgence of "the idea that the basic and universal structures of the psyche, the formal patterns of its relational modes, are archetypal patterns" (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 14). Therefore, while Hillman's articulation of *therapeia* was quite unique, Jung could be said to be his predecessor in the therapeutic application of something like *epistrophē*.

Another predecessor was Henry Corbin (1970), who translated from Islamic mystics such as Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi, offering up his interpretations of their visions of a *mundus imaginalis* or imaginal world—in Hillman's (1981/2013a) summary, a "distinct field of imaginal realities requiring methods and perceptual faculties different from the spiritual world beyond it or the empirical world of usual sense perception" (p. 14). Hillman (1981/2013a) thus credited Corbin and the Islamic gnosticism into which the latter was immersed with providing an "ontological mode of locating the archetypes

of the psyche” (p. 14)—that is, a theoretical context for such notions as “depth geography” (Hillman, 2006/2016k, p. 368) and epistrophic “*placing*” (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 43). As Hillman (2007/2016o) saw it, such Islamic gnosticism even had a direct parallel to *epistrophē* itself—namely: *ta’wil*, which Corbin (1970) summarized as “*reconduire, ramener une chose à son origine et principe, à son archetype*” (p. 240), to lead something back to its origin and principle, to its archetype.

Hillman spent many years discovering and piecing together such diverse influences on his own approach to soul reclamation (c.f. Russell, 2013)—for such a prolific author, it is notable that Hillman did not complete his first book (Hillman, 1964/1998) until he was in his late 30’s. However, what emerged from this wide-ranging youthful synthesis was a robust psychological philosophy centered on ideas of *epistrophē*. These ideas were to guide the methods of *therapeia* that would be found at the heart of Hillman’s work and teachings for the rest of his life. The perceptual return of soul phenomena to their imaginal and mythic ground became, in other words, the foundation of Hillmanian healing.

Such healing is not only a positive or constructive process. It is also an intensely uncomfortable and destructive one—and this, too, is found in Hillmanian psychology in what seems to be

an endless joust with literalism, fundamentalism, dogma, and any form of ideological fixation. In a sense, such a campaign against literalism is what supplants notions of moralistic good and evil within a Hillmanian view. The danger to truly beware is not located so much in any particular nightmare as it is found in that which constricts the imagination—the space to dream—*itself*.

This juxtaposition between imagination and literalism appears very clearly in Hillman's (1996/2016n) work, in which literalism is described as "worse than a careless habit; it is a violation of the elusive, innovative, and open essence of the psyche" (p. 353). Strong words indeed—and yet the primary Hillmanian antidote, even to this greatest of perceived dangers, is not a militant mobilization but rather an imaginal opening. In language and interpersonal communication, such an opening takes the form of metaphor and mythopoetics, which are a way to maintain soul presences within thought and word. Such imaginal language wards against the tyranny of the instrumental rationality that otherwise constricts the range of the human imagination. As Hillman (1977/2014e) put it: "Without the blue bridge of metaphor we fall into black-and-white thinking: either/or, fact/fancy, good/bad. ... Crucified by

opposites” (p. 11). This, then, is the psycho-culturally protective function within “cosmic speech” (Hillman, 1989, pp. 228-230):

We are impoverished psychologically when we are impoverished linguistically. The bridges are down because the moon is down, imagination beclouded by literal information. We have forgot Coleridge’s warning about “the danger of thinking without images” and so our minds, our very civilization, succumbs at one and the same time to both cynical nihilism and full-faithed fundamentalism. (Hillman, 1997/2016r, p. 47)

One sees here how Hillmanian psychology traces the collective crises of “our very civilization” (Hillman, 1997/2016r, p. 47) to this same imperilment of imagination. In my own terms, such a link indicates the resonance between the different manifestations of wilderness itself, whether such is the wilderness of soul and dream, of mountains and forests, or of the living sensory body. If each of these manifestations of wilderness are linked, then so too is the indicated cure for modernity’s dysfunctions—a cure that Hillman (2006/2016m) described in terms of a kind of alchemy of the imagination:

Imagining offers a freedom from the magic of certitude, by recognizing that beliefs begin in images and are always images too, images that have lost their wings and fallen

into truths. The angelic aspect of human being is the unbounded imagination. (p. 281)

This is the fundamental Hillmanian move: that which gives imaginal wings even to what would appear as its enemy or disease. Whether encountering a pleasant dream or apparent nightmare, the Hillmanian move is to lucidly restore each phenomenon to its fullest context in soul: its mythic home. The method of doing this is through image—as in metaphor, which is how images appear in language. Thus, metaphor is a method of alchemizing manifest phenomena into image, which can be worked and potentially transmuted psychologically. As Hillman (1979/2014d) put it: “Metaphors are psychological language—and all alchemy is metaphorical. ... Alchemy transmutes the world to the dream, which it does in the laboratory of its language” (p. 152).

The restoration of literalist certitudes to their homes in the imaginal soul—their *archai*—is understood to soften the places that fundamentalism and literalism has hardened consciousness, and so opens them once again to the fluidity of dream. Thus, one once more sees the simultaneously creative and destructive praxis of Hillmanian *therapeia*, as when a potter moistens dried-out clay, destroying the former shape and making the material available to mold anew. As Hillman

(1990/2014b) emphasized, this simultaneous destruction and creation is characteristic of all alchemy

and especially one pair of operations that have come to stand for the work of alchemy in general: *solve et coagula*.

Dissolve and coagulate. Whatever is permanent and habitual must be dissolved by heat and water, and whatever is wishy washy, floating, uncertain, and vaporous must be thickened, hardened, fixed, and reduced. (p. 242)

So it is that *epistrophē*—the return of phenomena to their mythic roots or *archai*—can also be considered as an alchemy that imaginally dissolves and reconstitutes identification, literalization, polarization: all loss of psychic possibility. Such restoration into the fluidity of the mythic imagination has the potential to return even highly entrenched patterns into their “full complexity of emotions and images, always capable of metamorphosis, even as the cure detaches the person from the singleness of identification” (Hillman, 1986/2016d, pp. 292–293). It is in this sense of imaginal liberation that Hillman (1986/2016d) described *therapeia* as a work to “release the mind into its originality beyond the old entrapped condition” (p. 295).

Such a phrase reveals two additional things—first, a distrust for what the human mind has become, mirroring the existential sense that somewhere in history, humanity has taken an odd left turn. Second, this phrase reveals that for Hillman (1986/2016d), the brokenness is actually a broken-off-ness—for there is an “originality” into which one seeks to “release the mind” (p. 295). That is to say that behind the notion of *epistrophē*, one finds not only an implied sense of brokenness but also one of primordial wholeness or harmony—a home to which soul endeavors, alchemically, to return. These themes of the modern mind’s alienation, an underlying cosmic wholeness, and the possibility of homecoming are central aspects in the Green Man’s restoration into the collective imagination of modernity, today. Hillmanian psychology, then, has a great deal to offer in the quest for ecopsychological and existential collective healing.

A Hermeneutic of Hospitality

One could venture that within epistrophic psychology, there is an attitude of both homelessness and hopefulness regarding the situation of the human soul. This bittersweet juxtaposition ought to be familiar to those who know the mindset of Jewish diaspora—or of any people who have come to identify themselves as perennial exiles, and who are therefore

never home but always home-coming. It is interesting to share with Hillman this Jewish background, for while neither of us would identify as religiously Jewish, the eternal quest for home seems to be the same deeper movement of *epistrophē*—which like Lurianic Kabbalah takes such seeking beyond the personal and into a praxis that looks for the “*placing*” (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 43) of all phenomena in the world. Such an understanding gives a very different sense to the meaning of terms such as Hillman’s (2006/2016k) “cosmic homing” (p. 369) and his “place for each spark” (Hillman, 1971/2013b, p. 133).

Paul Ricoeur (1970, 1981) described two general hermeneutic attitudes: a hermeneutic of faith that seeks to restore the meaning of a text’s authors and a hermeneutic of suspicion that seeks to demystify or challenge a text’s assumptions. While a hermeneutic of faith risks uncritical acceptance of the assertions and attitudes of a text, a hermeneutic of suspicion risks failing to give a text a chance to be received on its own terms—a chance that is important because hermeneutic analyses typically engage texts whose claims to truth are not the kind that can be immediately or conclusively judged. It is for this reason that Gadamer (1960/1975) argued that hermeneuts must not “stand over” (p. 278) texts as allegedly neutral judges but should rather place

themselves “under” (p. 278) texts—that is, make themselves available to be affected by texts, thus forming a coevolutionary dialogue: the hermeneutic circle.

Should a Hillmanian approach be considered a hermeneutic of faith or of suspicion? The case is not so clear-cut. On the one hand, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Hillmanian psychology rejects all claims to objective or final knowing. Knowledge about reality is “something that is not to be reduced, but belongs to its essential condition, to its fullness” (Hillman, 2007/2016b, p. 335). Indeed, even though he was an author, Hillman (1996/2013c) was fundamentally suspicious of text itself, for he saw the rise of textuality and the decline of oral cultures as culpable in the “fall from metaphor” (p. 155), which was the alienation of the human intellect from its source in soul. This exile from soul “comes with writing, that is, when images are graven” (p. 152). Whereas oral traditions endlessly permute their stories in the telling and therefore resist “singleness of meaning” (Hillman, 1997/2014c, p. 93), written traditions generate stable textual accounts, which become sources of authoritative and literalist interpretation (c.f. Abram, 1997). Indeed, the etymology of *literal* is just this: that which is in accordance with liturgy, the authoritative written text. In

contrast, “Myth contains many versions; myth requires many versions. No *graven* images” (Hillman, 1996/2013c, p. 153).

With this in mind, one might conclude that Hillmanian interpretation should be considered a hermeneutic of suspicion. That is to say, all authoritative texts, all final conclusions, all entrenched belief systems, are inherently suspect. There is something to this—Hillman (1997/2014c) appreciated suspicious hermeneutics such as deconstruction and criticism as valuable precisely because they tend to overthrow literalist and authoritative readings:

The contemporary attempts at multiple meanings (polysemy), of separating the signifier and the signified, of playing with the ambiguity of “trace,” troping, displacing, and insisting upon difference and, as well, the absenting of all certitudes from positive propositions, these deconstructive moves may be French modes of decapitating the *cogito*—freeing the mind from the singleness that I condemn as literalism. (Hillman, 1997/2014c, p. 93)

Yet this deconstructive mode is clearly only one aspect of the Hillmanian approach, for while suspicious of authoritative and literalist accounts, Hillmanian psychology is not primarily an exercise in criticism. The goal is, rather, the homecoming of

epistrophē, and the praxis of deliteralization—“decapitating the *cogito*” (p. 93)—is not the final intent but is rather meant to “release the mind into its originality beyond the old entrapped condition” (Hillman, 1986/2016d, p. 295). The challenge to literal readings, beliefs, and identities, in other words, is meant to liberate phenomena from entrapment in fundamentalism—whether personal, cultural, or religious—by instead seeing things through to their mythic and imaginal roots. Such a liberation is a perceptual liberation, a liberation of soul; by being understood as mythic and imaginal unfoldings rather than taken literally and materially, “these bits of matter convert to inner ground” (Hillman, 1975, p. 138). Hillman (1981/2013a) referred to this as *soul-making*: “Soul-making is also described as imaging, that is, seeing or hearing by means of an imagining that sees through an event to its image. Imaging means releasing events from their literal understanding into a mythical appreciation” (p. 35).

I think it is incorrect, then, to consider a Hillmanian approach as a hermeneutic of suspicion. For while suspicious of all literalism, such a hermeneutic adopts a genuine attitude of faith regarding the mythos that lies beneath all symbols. Faith, here, cannot mean a political loyalty to any dogma or tradition—rather, it means that an epistrophic hermeneutics is extremely

sympathetic to each fragment of psyche on its own mythic terms. Because every phenomenon can be traced to its cosmic home in *archai*, every phenomenon must be considered at its essence to be cosmically purposeful, in some sense entirely correct unto itself. Of course, any phenomenon may manifest as cruel, disharmonious, even apocalyptically destructive—yet *epistrophē* is premised on the notion that within every phenomenon is a link to its proper home and necessary function in cosmos. As Hillman (2002/2016e) put it, “all earthly things, all human themes seek to return to their *archai*, their *a priori* nature or imaginal reality unlimited by the human” (p. 316). This distinction between interpreted manifestation and archetypal essence is the distinction that can allow one to situate a Hillmanian hermeneutic in terms of faith and suspicion—Hillman is suspicious of all interpreted manifestation, especially when such interpretation takes itself literally—as truth—and simultaneously faithful regarding the indefinable but poetically resonant archetypal essences beneath.

What becomes striking is that this same distinction might be said to be rooted in the archetype of the Green Man, the Dionysian energy—for this distinction touches on the nature of ecstasy and that of the gods of ecstasy. It becomes clear precisely how little such ecstasy has to do with contemporary

associations of pleasure and happiness, for the etymology of the Greek *ekstasis*—which belonged primarily to the realm of Dionysius—had nothing to do with such feelings, but rather meant literally “to stand outside the self” (c.f. Merriam-Webster, 2022).

As I elaborate further in Chapter 7, the question that arises is this: what self is it that *ekstasis* stands outside of? The answer appears to be related to this distinction between interpreted manifestation and underlying depths, and is thus also related to the aforementioned broken-off-ness of the modern human mind from the underlying cosmic flux or wholeness. *Ekstasis* is a kind of a bridging back into this wholeness, this indefinable flux—a bridging of phenomenal consciousness with the *archai* beneath all identity, the *archai* that always exceed rational delimitation. Thus, as Evans (1988) put it: “The essence of the Dionysian tradition is the affirmation of the whole self through ecstatic ritual. Patriarchal civilization takes one facet of the person—the rationally calculating ego—and identifies it with selfhood” (p. 183).

To “stand outside the self” is, in this sense, to court reunion with a much broader, mythic, and cosmic sense of self—which is just what Dionysian *ekstasis* does. Thus, self-destruction and reconnection are inseparable, or as Nietzsche

(1872/1993) put it: “The ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, abolishing the habitual barriers and boundaries of existence, actually contains, for its duration, a lethargic element into which all past personal experience is plunged” (p. 39). This “Dionysiac state,” in other words, reaches an ecstasy of union with existence precisely through the dissolution of literalized identities and concretized personalities, which is also precisely what Hillman (1997/2014c) was after in “decapitating the *cogito*—freeing the mind from the singleness that I condemn as literalism” (p. 93). As detailed in subsequent chapters, the dismemberment of the Green Man occurs again and again within the mythos from its earliest recorded examples—thus the god himself mythically models a return to union through self-dissolution: the god of ecstasy is always going beyond himself, dissolving fixations, and is thus always coming home.

Another exemplary image comes to mind—for the gods of ecstasy are also famous for their gift of breaking free from any sort of imprisonment. The playwright Euripides has *The Bacchae’s* (405 B.C.E./1990) Dionysius locked in the dungeons of King Pentheus, but the god has not even been imprisoned for one night before a catastrophic earthquake strikes and the prison walls are torn asunder, setting the god free. One sees here how the wild and tectonic powers of the Dionysian are also

an expression of *ekstasis*, for they break open the “habitual barriers and boundaries of existence ... [and] release the mind into its originality beyond the old entrapped condition” (Hillman, 1986/2016d, p. 295). Hillman (1975) primarily considered such Dionysian forces in terms of the unconscious—the wilderness of psyche, soul, and dream: “Only when we have ... a link outside the ego to the dream ... are we truly moving the ego-complex” (p. 114).

Once more, the distinction between the broken-off-ness of the modern mind—“the ego-complex” (Hillman, 1975, p. 114)—and a more primordial wholeness, a cosmic wilderness, has come into view. So *ekstasis* is indeed homecoming, and thus Dionysius may be the patron of *epistrophē*. At least once, Hillman (1972/2016g) touched on this association: “If Dionysus is the Lord of Souls, he is the soul of nature, its psychic interiority. His ‘dismemberment’ is the fragments of consciousness strewn through all of life” (p. 280). Thus, his *rememberment* would be *tikkun olam*—or, in Neoplatonist terms, *epistrophê*. It is fitting, then, that the praxis of *epistrophê* is where my journey with the Green Man has led.

An Uncertain Approach

I introduce, at the beginning of this chapter, a general critique of the idea of objectivity in knowledge. This is a critique

that Hillman (1975) broadly shared, particularly regarding the impossibility of “a positive knowledge of the psyche” (p. 193). Indeed, Hillman (1975) tended to be suspicious of any idea that was articulated as a complete system, any summary that seemed too neat; after all: “When we believe we know the invisible, we begin on a ruinous course. We are now reaping the ignorant delusions of the last century’s positive knowledge of nature” (p. 193).

In other words, this suspicion regarding systems and summaries would seem to be based on this same distinction between the modern mind, which grasps for “positive knowledge,” and something more primal and fundamental: “nature” (Hillman, 1975, p. 193). The intimation is that systems and summaries tend to be a form of such grasping, which is always an imposition upon the natural wilderness of being. The tendency for such imposition may be endemic to human consciousness, but it seems to be intensified by textuality: some change in the behavior of the mind that “comes with writing, that is, when images are graven” (p. 152).

How does one think about thought without becoming trapped in thinking? How should one write literature without becoming literal? Such are the problems of return, following the “fall from metaphor” (Hillman, 1996/2013c, p. 155)—the

problems of the intellect's alienation from mythic roots. There are certain habits of mind, even habits of intellectual precision, that find themselves under suspicion in this context—for the kind of knowledge that can facilitate mythic *epistrophē*, homecoming, is “something that is not to be reduced” (Hillman, 2007/2016b, p. 335).

Hillmanian psychology endeavors, then, to protect the indigenous integrity of things from this tendency to reduce phenomena into literal categories and certain knowledge. Clearly the risk is not only from without—even as the epistrophic researcher seeks deepening understanding, this familiarity cannot be allowed to become reductive, a presumption that what is beheld is ever known. The praxis, then, must be in some sense paradoxical. Like the ouroboros of alchemy—the serpent swallowing its own tail—the practitioner must constantly dissolve the tendency to literalize and fixate on any concrete and “finished” idea. Even the goals of *epistrophē* itself—homecoming, healing—cannot be taken too literally. As Hillman (1975) put it:

Rather than a coherent psychological theory, our aim is a consistent psychological attitude. ... Our metapsychology is wholly mythic and imaginative. It insists on such unsystematic unknowables as depth, soul, and death. ...

What kind of theory could we construct, when we can't describe, let alone define, the basic terms in our vocabulary? (p. 195)

Thus, while “depth geography” (Hillman, 2006/2016k, p. 368) is an essential kind of knowledge for the epistrophic therapist, there can be no map of the dream—and there is no suggestion of a comprehensive system of archetypes to be found anywhere in Hillman's work. For as aligned with notions of participatory, indigenous, and mythopoetic epistemology as introduced at the beginning of this chapter, so the epistrophic therapist is not any kind of objective mapmaker, but rather a living consciousness engaged creatively with a changing landscape, having a particular experience and effect, like a poet or animal.

The vision of healing behind *therapeia*, then, cannot be a vision of a preexisting utopia, a cosmic wholeness that has already been determined. Drawing on the influence of William James's *eachness*, Hillmanian psychology holds that each epistrophic reunion must proceed in its own mode, its own dialectic, according to its own mythic lights (see Casey, 2016). As Hillman (1971/2013b) put it, *therapeia* should aim “less at gathering [fragments] into a unity and more at integrating each

fragment according to its own principle, giving each god its due over that portion of consciousness” (p. 133).

Relatedly, any idea that *therapeia* can be completed—or even that its completed form can be imagined—might be described as a kind of hubris: a spiritualized form of the inflated human intellect that thinks in literal terms and seeks for positive and final knowledge. The praxis of epistrophic therapist, then, is a lifelong and unconditional engagement, not a triumphal victory march. One may recollect another bit of Jewish wisdom, this from the *Talmud*: “You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it” (*Pirkei Avot 2:21*). Indeed, to literalize utopian visions within the mortal coil is always to invite fundamentalism—in the words of Reb Jesus, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight” (*Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, John 18:36). Thus, in Hillman’s (2006/2016k) words, *therapeia*

attempts to arrive in a condition of soul that is not in time and not in history, not even in physical space, a condition of soul that imagination may once have known, may always know, that innate imaginal cosmos whose truth is its beauty both in flowering and decay. (p. 369)

The vision of primordial wholeness that one finds behind Hillman's *therapeia*, then, must be considerably qualified. If this is a form of *tikkun olam*, then it is that of a very particular attitude: polytheistic, pagan, highly cautious of any earthly schematic or system. The goal is, indeed, less utopian than perceptual—the vision is vision itself. It is, perhaps, what the Jungians have called *unio mentalis*: the mind in union with soul or spirit (Jung, 1954/1977). Hillman's (1981/2014a) own take on such *unio mentalis* was, however, a little different; it was “the interpenetration of idea and mood, of perceived world and imaginal world ... [so that] the eye becomes blue, that is, able to see into thoughts and envision them as imaginative forms ... [and] images become the ground of reality” (pp. 118–119).

Such a *unio mentalis* does not erase the world's suffering nor its contradictions. It simply places them in their imaginal context: that is, the context of the dreaming soul. Such *epistrophē* offers no final utopia, nor even the concretism of a sketch of completed cosmic mandala. One cannot settle on such a completed finish line in this *therapeia*, for one finds that the kind of attention most deeply alchemized by the mythic imagination comes to rest not on any such totalizing system but instead on the unfolding of each unique cosmos—“that portion of consciousness” (Hillman, 1971/2013b, p. 133) that one finds

organized around each archetype, each god, each holy point of view. Thus, like the traditionally endless chorus of “next year in Jerusalem,” the attention of Hillmanian *epistrophē* is not so much on home as on homecoming: a living practice of imaginal hospitality.

For this reason, rather than a hermeneutic of faith or suspicion, I settle finally on the following term: *a hermeneutic of hospitality*. This is the attitude I adopt within this work.

Hillmanian knowledge, as has been seen, is never objective. Instead of measurement by numbers, Hillman (2004/2016p) favored “Proclus’s notion of measurement by means of gods” (p. 165). That is to say, the method of our measurement is none other than *epistrophē* itself. To measure a given phenomenon, the question is asked: to whom and to what homeland does this belong? It is in this sense that “hospitality” may be the best descriptor of the epistemology of the work.

Hospitality—not toward dogmatic claims or literalized identities, but toward the mythos or *archai* beneath phenomena—is thus taken as necessary for deepening understanding. As Hillman (2006/2016k) put it: “This notion restores dignity to phenomena, a return to the thing itself (in the language of Husserl) ... and is their true measure rather than the transcendence of meaning given to things from outside and

above them by mathematics” (p. 165). This, then, is the Hillmanian antidote to the modern mind’s tendency to reduce all phenomena to fit within some totalizing schematic, some reductive theory, some conceptual map that takes things as known and so ceases to *know* them. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a participatory epistemology recognizes, instead, that one is always situated relationally within an evolving cosmos; that is, to attempt to systematize or to know objectively is also a relational and cocreative move—unfortunately, often an invasive one. As Harvey (2002) put it:

The distance created by attempts at objectivity are, in fact, relational—albeit in aggressive, distancing, and alienating relationships. ... If people will not relate as friends, neighbors, or kin, perhaps they insist on relating as enemies. Having stood back and tried not to be moved or involved ... [scholars are] beginning to find out how guests and friends relate. (p. 13)

The importance of this shift toward hospitality is particularly salient in a work with a fundamentally therapeutic intention. Like the Tzutujil shamans who tracked down displaced spiritual energies in and around the village, so anyone who endeavors the healing of shadow should not expect the forces therein encountered to be bright and inoffensive beings

of light. Rather, the complexes most dense with wounding are those most in need of restoration, most requiring deepening understanding, most alienated from their own roots. As in a practice of lucid nightmare, *epistrophē* requires that one sees through any crusade against shadow, for hospitality necessitates that one is prepared to perceive into even the most disturbing phenomena with a curiosity that would know each thing in the light of its own mythos. Thus, Hillman (1986/2016f) summarized the attitude of *therapeia* as follows:

We would not greet the stranger, a newly met phenomenon, asking for its origin, its composition, the ground of its possibility, its usefulness, and how it fits into the overall scheme of things. Indeed, inquiry itself would be felt to be unbecoming, rude, perhaps shameful. ... Instead of inquiry: interest, respect, welcome, praise—even attachment. To greet each event with desire, wanting it to stay. (p. 96)

With this in mind, a hermeneutic of hospitality must be prepared to welcome even mythic presences that may be unpopular or demonized. The hermeneut of hospitality must be prepared for feuding presences, for polarizations between myths, some of which may have been millennia in the making. The art of hospitality includes the considerable challenge of

welcoming even such ancestral enemies to sit together at the hermeneutic table, to each be understood according to their own lights as far as possible, even when such presences may yet be unready to open toward or understand each other.

When polarization is strong, the approach of hospitality itself is often considered unacceptable: “You are with us or against us,” says the crusader’s mentality. “It’s one way or the other,” says the literalist. Thus, the hermeneut of hospitality cannot be toothless; as Hillman (1997/2014c) exemplified, the stance requires a deep-rooted commitment for constantly “decapitating the *cogito*—freeing the mind from the singleness that I condemn as literalism” (p. 93). Ironically, the hermeneut of hospitality may therefore be considered divisive, combative, stubborn, and so forth, precisely because such commitment to what is exiled requires one to topple the tyranny of the ego mind and the cultural consensus, both of which often rely on polarization against scapegoats.

A hermeneutic of hospitality requires its practitioners to extend as sincere an interest toward the mythos of an era’s monsters as toward that of its heroes. Such practitioners must be, in a certain sense, apolitical—not in the sense of disconnection from the common good, but in the manner of refusing the attraction and convenience of polarization. Just as a

practice of lucid nightmare begins with a nonjudgmental willingness to receive, study, and even appreciate the nightmare images, so too a mythic image cannot be understood in the light of its own mythos if it has already been rejected and prejudged. As Hillman (1994/2016q) put it, therefore, *therapeia* “will be quite goalless, simply looking intently, closely, simply hearing the voices of the *daimones*, elaborating pleasurably the images presented and responding to what they ask” (p. 222).

The ensuing study of the Green Man includes mythic images, past practices, and even contemporary implications that may be distasteful and disturbing to some readers. Human sacrifice, whether such practices are taken as literal or only symbolic, are one example. Consideration of gender identities and the role of masculinity in the past and the present is today a political minefield—and an unavoidable aspect of looking closely at the mythos of the Green Man. More clear-cut cases of patriarchal oppression and violence also appear herein, especially in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

In all of these cases, a hermeneut of hospitality must resist the temptation to immediately polarize and must instead seek to stay within appreciative study of the range of meanings and relationships offered by the natural ecology of the myths—because the loyalty of a hermeneut of hospitality is first for this

wild richness, and cannot therefore be for any other agenda. Such is the role and function of the hermeneut of hospitality: to appreciate and elaborate what is endemic within myth and ecology and phenomena itself—so that it may be more deeply understood.

Hospitality requires that one treats with the mythic figures almost as if they were living beings, even esteemed guests, worthy of and demanding respect. Hospitality is a radical act because this requirement remains true even when the guests may be troublesome or disturbing. By remaining dedicated to hospitality even so, the hermeneut seeks to draw out the myths' own indigenous meanings, on their own terms. Thus, in Hillman's (1975) words, "We must grapple with each dream bare-handed ... without theoretical goals saying how it should all come out and when the engagement is over. Having no theory, we can only stick to the dream" (p. 195).

Such a commitment should not be mistaken for any form of political denialism. The commitment to deal with soul images on their own terms does not imply an ignorance of the suffering of history nor of the crises, problems, and tragedies that in some cases may be traceable to aspects of psyche related to this or that mythic figure. One should not assume that a hermeneutic of hospitality is based in such naïveté or ignorance—for it rather

emerges out of a deep experience of shadow that yields the impression that a commitment to deeply receiving and understanding what has been misplaced and twisted up may be the most sensible of all responses to a broken and unjust world.

This would seem to be the same awareness implied by the Lurianic telling of *tikkun olam*. It would also seem to be the awareness that must have been implicit somewhere in me when I began to turn, lucidly, toward my own nightmares. I am still turning more deeply toward the dreams and the nightmares, seeking *therapeia* in the world and in the dream. Hillman's *epistrophē* offers an eloquent account for such a praxis: this method of hospitality to soul that characterizes the path of the shadow-worker, the myth-worker, the conscious dreamer. May this hermeneutic, then, play some small part in the gathering of lost sparks, the lifting up of those scattered pieces that have been entrapped in forgetful matter. May they thus be returned to a somewhat deeper understanding, closer to their *archai*, closer to their roots in soul, closer to their origin, closer to the light of the divine.

CHAPTER 3: THE WELLSPRINGS OF CULTURE

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty
If your cup is full may it be again
Let it be known there is a fountain
That was not made by the hands of men
(Grateful Dead, 1970)

The Autochthonous Soil of Greece

In historical scholarship of the roots of Western civilization, Greece has generally taken center-stage—arguably, at times, leaving little room for anyone else. The perception of a myopic focus on Greek roots in classical education has discouraged some contemporaries from wanting to give the Greeks further attention at all: how often on today's college campus is pronounced some version of the refrain, "Can we stop talking about old, dead Greeks?" Yet, Classical Greece was in truth an extraordinary flourishing, and its influences are, in many respects, still being worked out today. Upon the stone entrance to the most famous temple of the Classical Greek world—the Oracle of Delphi, where seeresses pronounced prophecy—"Know Thyself" was boldly inscribed for all pilgrims to read. Perhaps it is only appropriate, then, that Western civilization would one day come to know itself partly through knowing the Classical Greeks.

And yet, this acknowledgement of Greek influence should also be qualified, for Greek civilization did not arise in a

vacuum. The Greeks themselves were aware of a surrounding context, both geographically and historically, in which they perceived their own culture arising and unfolding. Even the Olympic gods, according to Greek myth, would rule supreme in but one of the world's several ages. Perhaps this mythic fact arose in the context of certain historical realities—for what came to be considered “Greece,” that is, the Hellenistic world, seems to have been formed as a compound culture following the invasion of “warrior bands who emerged after the fall of Mycenaean royal legitimacy” (Bellah, 2011, p. 335). Such invading clans—whose descendants formed the Hellenistic aristocracy—could not have originally had a uniform identity of their own, for they were but a combination of various repeated “new waves of ... Greek invaders” (Evans, 1988, p. 41) heralding from many lands and cultures.

The resulting gods of the Olympian pantheon and the predominantly urban elites who worshipped them were thus formed out of the combined cultures of these various invaders—as Bellah (2011) put it: “Like many others the Greek aristocracy began as a warrior aristocracy” (p. 329). Certain admirable aspects of Greek culture no doubt come from this warrior clan root: for example, the ideal of *arreté* or competitive excellence in athletics and the arts. As Bellah (2011) noted, such warrior

clans “competed for excellence and virtually created the culture of athletics as we know it today, in which winning was of enormous importance” (p. 335).

There may also be certain foundations of participatory democracy that can be attributed to these aristocratic clans—for they did generally operate within a certain balance of powers. As Bellah (2011) wrote: “The effort of one family to dominate the polis would be resisted by other noble families, even more, initially, than by non-nobles” (p. 335). This is to say, the warrior aristocracy was not a tyranny, but generally ruled through political discourse and consensus—that is, discourse and consensus within an extremely limited caste of warrior clan leaders. While the result was a form of group rule, it could by no means be called a democracy.

So where do the later ideals of democracy and participation arise from, within Athens? I have suggested previously that a clue is provided in the august presence of the Theater of Dionysius. Dionysius was not a god of these urban elites—notably, he was not even counted as an Olympian. Rather—as described by the likes of Kerényi (1976), Sjöö and Mor (1987), Evans (1988), and Ruck (2013), and as I discuss in the chapters that follow—he was very much a representative of an ancient fertility tradition that far-predated the invasions of

the warrior clans. In this sense, the democracy and participatory flourishing that arose in Athens was symbolically associated not so much with the warrior aristocracy as with the region's indigenous people and their preexisting ecospiritual traditions. In part, such an ancient lineage can be traced most immediately to the inheritance of the Minoans and the Mycenaeans; for during the previous millennium, as Evans (1988) described,

all sites of Minoan and Mycenaean civilization were burned and sacked. A dark age ensued until about 800 B.C., when classical Greek civilization as we know it first began to emerge. Though speaking Greek, this new civilization was in fact a hybrid of both Greek and earlier Minoan elements, which did not always form an easy mix. (p. 41)

Thus, one way to view the constitution of Greek society is in this dual-structure—that of the aristocratic descendants of the warrior clans who particularly ruled in the city polis, and that of the majority inhabitants of the region who were predominantly rural and still possessed much of their indigenous and ecospiritual inheritance. While this could be said to be true for all of Greece, it may have been especially the case for the inhabitants of Attica—for as Ruck (2013) put it: “The

Athenians considered themselves autochthonous, which is to say, the indigenous population of Attica” (p. 352). The locals of Attica—that is, not the urban aristocracy, but the rural majority of the region’s population—still considered themselves to be the direct descendants of the Pelasgians, “one of the pre-Greek peoples, largely bypassed by the Indo-European migrations” (p. 352). Much like the Minoans, the Pelasgians seem to have originally been matrilineal and primarily worshipped fertility gods—especially revering “the ‘goat’ goddess Pallas as the patroness of the city” (Ruck, 2013, p. 352). Notably, the later Dionysius would also be associated with the tradition of the goat: most especially in the form of *Dionysius Eleuthereus*, “Dionysius of the Black Goat,” whose inscription was featured at the Theater of Dionysius on “the front row seats in the center” (Evans, 1988, p. 81).

It seems, then, that Dionysianism—and whatever role it may have played in the rise of participatory democracy in Attica—was itself quite clearly rooted in this ancient and indigenous ancestry that predated the Classical city-state. Indeed, the rich character of that pre-Classical inheritance is in part the subject of this dissertation. But as for the source of such cultural patterns—the grail of original cultural ancestry—that is much more difficult to say, for though one may trace many mythic and

cultural parallels, their origins appear to vanish across wide expanses and into the fog of prerecorded time. Perhaps the most one can do with historical rigor is to trace the evolution of such widespread cultural forms to the best-preserved and earliest known examples—and if that is the criterion, then it seems that one can do no better than to look back to the Sumerians, who far preceded the Greeks as the major cultural ancestor of modernity, but who have received far less attention.

Had archaeologists from Europe managed to study the ruins of old Mesopotamia before unearthing those in Greece, then it may very well have been the Sumerians and not the Greeks who came to be pictured as modernity's foremost ancestor. But Sumerian written accounts only became available around the mid-19th century, thanks to the excavation and translation of the cuneiform clay tablets—which, it turns out, when hardened by fire, have the distinction of being perhaps the sturdiest of all traditional recording technologies, as clay does not rot (c.f. Kramer, 1956/1971). It may have simply been the historical exigency of Europe's proximity to Classical-age Greece, both geographically and temporally, that granted the Greeks rather than the Sumerians the role of foremost acknowledged ancestors to the West. This proximity allowed a much earlier historical retrieval by European scholars, such that

the Hellenistic influence was available at the beginning of its renewed search for origins and identity—that is, the Renaissance.

With a greater scope of retrospection now available, students of history should note that long before the Greek Classical period, some 4,000 years ahead and 2,000 miles east of the flowering of culture, art, and political participation in Athens, another collective of relatively wealthy and innovative city-states was already laying down many of the patterns that would form the fundamental inheritance for the modern. Sumerian civilization, supreme in Mesopotamia for two thousand years from approximately 4000 to 2000 B.C.E., is the first clear example of much that is considered innovative in the move from traditional indigenous lifeways into agrarian civilization; this insight formed the basis for Kramer's (1956) popular book on the many important things that the Sumerians, more or less, did first. This keystone role played by Sumer has become enough of a scholarly consensus that a reputed Assyriologist like Bottéro (2001) could summarize Sumerian civilization as

those ancient, vanished Mesopotamians, whom we have ultimately come to recognize as our most ancient ancestors, those discernible and accessible in our most

distant past, the first builders of the civilization that continues to sustain us and that has spread widely throughout the world. (p. vii)

Those Ancient, Vanished Mesopotamians

One might say, then, that according to Bottéro (2001) the grail of civilization's origin has been found, and it is Sumer. Given the breadth of contribution and innovation, such a claim is attractive—but it is also problematic. To begin with, if the Sumerians are “our most ancient ancestors” (p. vii), then how exactly should one trace this genealogical line? The lineage from the Greeks—through Rome and various Medieval and Renaissance influences—is quite clear; but what of the line from the much more distant Sumer?

In broad terms, Sumerian cultural hegemony in Mesopotamia was followed by that of the Babylonians, whom inarguably received much of the basis for their culture, myth, and religion from their Sumerian predecessors. Babylon, in turn, influenced many of the peoples more typically considered as the forerunners of the West, including Greece through Near-Eastern influences and Hebraic Israel, most illustratively through the historical event of the Babylonian exile, from which the Israelites appear to have returned with many ideas and motifs garnered from the culture of their captors. These two examples,

both stemming from Babylon, are notable given that the ancient Greeks and ancient Hebrews taken together might be said to make up a lion's share of the West's cultural roots (c.f. Abram, 1997). Yet one should note, as I review in Chapter 6, that there many other lines of mythic and cultural transmission to consider; as Bottéro (2001) wrote, post-Sumerian history is filled with "echoes and lineages, even complements, of the [Sumerian] cosmology" (Bottéro, 2001, p. 79).

So, certainly, modernity owes a great deal to Sumer. Yet, just as a more critical look at Greek roots yields the insight that they cannot really be considered the originators of Western culture, so a more critical look at the Sumerians reveals essentially the same: origins, it turns out, may mostly be a matter of perceptual vanishing point. When one can no longer make out a more distant ancestry, one assumes origination—but this is a mirage, for no matter how manifold one may telescope perception, true origin does not come into view. Rather, what eventually comes into view is the fact that singular origin is itself a fantasy, for there are always more distant and obscure influences, both further back in time and laterally in parallel sources.

So where does this leave us? The scene starts to look less like a genealogical line than an interlocking web of channels.

Such an image may be particularly fitting given that networks of channels were fundamental to early agrarian civilizations like Sumer. Not only were riverine networks instrumental in the rising technologies of irrigated agriculture, but the rivers, wetlands, and sources of waters were also considered mythologically and cosmologically key (Bottéro, 2001; Frazer, 1890/1994). In fact, growing reliance on irrigation appears to have only emphasized an older truth: that water is inevitably among the foremost questions of life (c.f. Jacobsen, 1976; Otto, 1965). Perhaps then, if the grail quest for origination leads anywhere, it leads into such watery depths.

Water and origination are symbolically intertwined in the written record all the way back to the oldest examples of cosmological myth. In the Babylonian creation myth of the *enûm elish*, for example, the oceanic Tiamat is considered among the most ancient of all divinities. A kind of saltwater mother serpent of titanic proportions, Tiamat's immense body was taken as synonymous with the primordial world—and just as the narrative of evolutionary biology holds that the primordial soup from whence we came gave way to a diversity of life and ecosystems on land and sea, so the king of the Babylonian gods was said in the *enûm elish* to derive his authority from the fact that he had successfully differentiated that original water-world

by carving Tiamat into many pieces (c.f. Bottéro, 2001; Sjöö & Mor, 1987). In Bottéro's (2001) words, "Marduk was to be crowned king ... because he had saved them from the great original mother goddess" (p. 56). Thus, the Babylonians described this prehistorical carving-up of the oceanic mother as the birth of the Earth as we know it: land and sea, rivers and deserts, forests and hills.

While the *enûm elish* may be Babylonian, it is based—like much Babylonian myth—on a Sumerian precursor. Bottéro (2001), for example, noted Sumerian fragments that "appear to suggest the existence at the very beginning of things ... of an isolated divine entity, unique and huge. ... Simultaneously a supernatural figure, place, and matter, it was believed to be of a watery nature, marine" (p. 74). The Sumerian text of the An/Anum calls this figure Nammu, and she appears to be both a kind of cosmic mother and also in some sense prior to gender itself, for it is only her divine children that begin to pair up sexually—male and female—and thereby propagate the Earth. In this light, Sjöö and Mor (1987) termed this figure *the parthenogenatrix*—their original self-creating or autonomous mother—a mythic parallel to what they saw as the origin of life in "a very female sea ... the womb-like environment of the planetary ocean" (p. 2). Whether one accepts this gendering or

not, it is fair to say that Nammu does appear precede, at least mythically or cosmogenically if not necessarily historically, “the ancestors of Anu, as if it were a matter of an individual theogony, even earlier than the oldest divinities” (p. 75). One may find in Nammu, then, some millennia before the Babylonian Tiamat, a source of life in primordial oneness—that is, in the undifferentiated waters.

Perhaps it is in part this undifferentiated quality of the primordial that gives ancestry its elusive nature. Water blends together, and once blended is inseparable. When one attempts to track up the riverbeds of time, to identify the ancestry of one’s waters, one finds that wellsprings have bubbled up here and there and eventually lost all boundaries in the network of mingling flows. Furthermore, not only do waters confusingly intermix on the surface of the world, they are even more mysterious as they intermingle in the hidden vastness beneath the earth. This, too, the Sumerians appear to have described mythically—for the Sumerian cosmology included, at the font of all separate channels, a ubiquitous groundwater: the *apsu*.

Beneath the surface of the world, held the Sumerians, was buried a great reservoir of the purest waters one could imagine. The Sumerian word for this vast freshwater ocean, world-spanning and source of all springs, has been transcribed

variously as *apsu*, *abzu*, *apsi*, and so on (c.f. Horowitz, 1998).

This *apsu* was also sometimes described as the oldest child of the primordial mother, even older than the earth-mother Ki or the sky-father Anu. As the opening lines of the *enûm elish* declare:

When the skies above were not yet named

Nor earth below pronounced by name,

Apsu, the first one, their begetter,

And maker Tiamat, who bore them all

Had mixed their waters together,

But had not [yet] formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds (Dalley, 2nd millenium B.C.E./1991, p. 233)

Thus, even in these earliest of associations, the underworldly *apsu* is a source of origination and formative potentials. In this light, one should note that while *apsu* itself can be translated literally as “sweetwater” or “freshwater,” this same word, in Sumerian, also means seed or semen. As Jacobsen (1976) put it: “The power in water that makes the soil produce was thought to be of a kind with the engendering power in male semen. Sumerian does not differentiate semen and water: one word stands for both” (p. 111). This, it turns out, will be a motif that recurs again and again in the mythos of the Green Man—and in Sumer, its first recorded example, the motif

was mediated by the figure of Enki: the Sumerian god of the *apsu*.

God of Wetlands, God of Groundwater

On first impression, gods of groundwater might seem to have little to do with the vibrant and youthful male fertility gods of the surface world. Groundwater is a dark and underworldly realm—yet, one should keep in mind that, for the ancients, underworldly darkness had nothing to do with evil. Such associations between the dark earth and the forces of evil are much later developments, and the powers of soil and buried water were, for the Sumerians, considered vital and good. After all, such powers feed the growth of plants, making food possible.

Enki is a good example of this underworldly beneficence. Typically pictured as an elderly counselor and sorcerer, Enki was portrayed as a shrewd but well-intentioned old sage (c.f. Jacobsen, 1976). By the time of the more organized mythos of late Sumer, he would grow to be considered one of the great lords of the pantheon—one of the few deities, for example, capable of defying the divine king Enlil on various occasions. In one such myth, when Enlil capriciously decided to flood the world and eliminate the irritating human population, it was Enki's cunning mercy that saved humankind (Dalley, 2nd

millennium B.C.E./1991). In such examples as this one sees that like Hades of the Greek Olympians—a god similarly known as a master of the invisible and the subterranean—Enki was never subservient to the reigning sky god, but rather a lord and steward of his own autonomous domain.

Enki's origin, however, was more local—he seems to have begun as the fertility deity of the early wetland city of Eridu. In this form, he was much closer to what one would imagine as the typical male fertility god: thus, indeed, Jacobsen (1976) included him in a categorical list of such gods within early Sumer: “Enki, god of the fresh water and of vegetable and animal marsh life in Eridu in the west” (p. 25). As such, the early Enki was parallel to other local fertility figures such as Lugulbanda the bull god and various local forms of Dumuzi—as detailed in the next chapter. While the later Enki seems to have abandoned many of these early fertility associations in favor of personification as a wise old sage, some epithets lingered—he was, for example, still sometimes called “the wild bull of Eridu” (p. 63). Indeed, the name Enki itself is a reminder of the original character of the god, as Jacobsen (1976) wrote:

His name Enki (i.e., en-ki...) “Lord (i.e. productive manager) of the soil,” reflects the role of water in fructifying the earth. Other names such as Lugal-id(ak),

“Owner of the river,” Lugal-abzu(ak), “Owner of the Apsû,” and the Akkadian Naqbu, “Source,” present him as the specific power in rivers or underground waters. (p. 111)

As these various titles and associations clarify, the god originally mingled together a complex of symbols including the source of life, the buried groundwaters, the rivers, and the powers of fertility. It is not incidental that fertility is especially apparent in the ecosystem of Enki’s origin—that is, the wetlands—where groundwaters bubble up and create a rich effulgence of vegetal growth and biodiversity. This fact becomes particularly interesting when compared with later traditions, such as that of Greek Dionysianism—for Dionysius, too, was a god of the waters. “The cults and myths are as explicit as they can be about the fact that Dionysus comes out of the water and returns to it, and that he has his place of refuge and home in the watery depths” (Otto, 1965, p. 162).

While contemporary remembrance tends to fixate on Poseidon as the Greek god of the sea, the fact is that Dionysius was also quite often found in this oceanic role: “In Pagasae he was worshipped as the ‘god of the sea’ ...; In Chios, as the ‘god of the seacoast’” (Otto, 1965, p. 163). The god was also famous for his verdant green grottos—that is, a kind of marshy cave—

which seem to have been the most ancient and typical setting for his sacred sites. As Otto (1965) noted, “Homeric Hymn 26 ... has the god grow up in a grotto as a protégé of the [river] nymphs. And a Berlin vase painting shows a huge mask of the god mounted in a grotto” (pp. 163–164). Kerényi (1976) similarly observed that “The grotto ... which shows up so often in his cults and myths, points to his predilection for the element of moisture” (p. 291).

Moving beyond this general connection to water and moisture, one may note that Dionysius—like the Sumerian Enki—was even more especially associated with marshes and swamps. The swamp association was particularly true in Athens, which was after all the site of the Theater of Dionysius and the general epicenter of the Dionysian tradition in the Classical Greek world. Yet long before the Theater rose to prominence, Dionysius was already associated with a sacred precinct of far older prestige: “According to Thucydides, the temple of Dionysos Limnaios [Dionysius of the Swamps] was situated to the south of the Akropolis and was one of the city’s oldest sanctuaries” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 292).

While the original location of this ancient temple has been lost, something can be gathered about its character by the fact that it was said to be situated around a very pure issuance of

spring water. One should not imagine, in the case of either Enki or this Dionysius Limnaios, that one is dealing with gods of some fetid bog or rank still-water. Quite the opposite is the case, for the wetlands temples tended to be built up around wellsprings of crystalline clarity. The Sumerian *apsu*, after all, meant sweet-water, certainly not bog water, and as for Dionysius of the Swamps:

The nature of the “swamps” is indicated by representations on certain *choës* showing a rock and by Phanodemos’ statement that the wine there was mixed with spring water. The place must have been a geological formation characteristic of Greece, the best known example of which is the swamp of Lerna: water pours abundantly from under the rocks, yet despite its purity it forms a “swamp.” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 292)

In his function as the god of wine, it was traditionally water from this specific wellspring that was mixed with the season’s newly opened vintage in the festival of *Anthesteria*. *Anthesteria* was a festival of the spirits, an underworldly festival—a ceremony of the dead and of seasonal renewal. Thus, in mixing this particular water with wine, one was mingling two kinds of Dionysian liquids, two kinds of spirits: namely, the wine of the exuberant grape of the surface world and the sacred

water of the purest spring that welled up from the underworld.

In Evans's (1988) words:

in the Athenian festival called *Anthesteria*, which occurred in early spring, people brought newly fermented jars of wine from their houses to the temple of Dionysos in the swamps, where they first opened the jar and tasted the new wine. ... The swamp site was regarded as the oldest temple of the god in Athens and the doorway to the underworld. (p. 59)

Any lingering superficial visions of Dionysius drunk on wine must now evaporate—for it becomes clear that one deals here with a god of profound and disturbing depths. *Anthesteria* reveals something about the meaning of intoxication for the Greeks—for just as *ekstasis* is not some pleasant interlude but an intimation of ego death, so the ceremonial wine was directly associated with the underworldly portal. That *Anthesteria* occurred in the swamps was surely no coincidence, for the wetlands were also generally considered such a portal to the realms below. In Kerényi's (1976) words:

Dionysos entered into the underworld and returned from it near Lerna: it was a gateway to Hades. The *limnai* [swamps] of Dionysos must have had the same significance for the Athenians. That is why in Aristophanes

the song of the frogs of this swamp accompanied Dionysos on his journey to the underworld, and why at the end of the all-souls-feast of the Anthesteria the people returned once again to this sanctuary of Dionysos. (p. 292)

Such swamps, then, appear to have been among the oldest associations of the god. In fact, age and antiquity come up repeatedly as motifs in reference to the underworldly and wetlands forms of the fertility gods, and this seems to have been the case both in Sumer and in Greece. Eridu—Enki’s holy city—was notably amongst the most ancient of Sumerian settlements, and in myth, its ancestral founder was considered to be none other than Enki himself (c.f. Jacobsen, 1976). As for Dionysius of the Swamps, Kerényi (1976) wrote: “The sanctuary in the swamp was regarded in Athens not only as the oldest but also as the most sacred temple of Dionysos” (p. 293).

Furthermore, this association with age is found not only in the temple sites but also in the figures of the gods themselves. For just as Enki could be considered as an unusually ancient and wizened image of the Sumerian fertility gods, so Dionysius appeared to be magically aged when found in these underworldly forms. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (1st century B.C.E./1935) wrote: “He was thought to have two forms, men say, because there were two Dionysi, the ancient one

having a long beard because all men in early times wore long beards, the younger one being youthful and effeminate and young” (5:2). Hence, not only was the underworldly Dionysius aged and bearded—like Enki—but he was also—like Enki—associated with a past age.

Yet I have made a small leap here—for while the supposed antiquity of the temple of Dionysius Limnaios and its underworldly associations seem to pair well with the idea that the Dionysius there worshipped was an ancient, wizened, and bearded figure, similar to Enki, there is not enough information regarding particular images of Dionysius of the Swamps to draw the figure with specific clarity. However, there is another bit of evidence that makes this case: for the Greeks, no less than the Sumerians, also generally paired an aged portrayal of the fertility god with the motif of underworldly waters. As Anderson (1990) noted: “Sometimes Dionysos is shown as an old man at the point when he goes to the underworld and he is also mysteriously in this underworld aspect identified with Okeanos, called by Homer the origin of the gods” (p. 40). That is to say, not only does the “younger, beautiful and exuberant Dionysos” (Diodorus Siculus, 1st century B.C.E./1935, 5:2) transform into an aged wise man in the underworldly depths, but that aged

wise man was even more specifically a mysterious oceanic lord associated with origins.

The comparison with Enki begins to seem quite compelling. One might hold out, here, that Okeanos is an ocean deity while Enki is a god of freshwater swamps and groundwaters. Yet, neither were entirely strict about saltwater or freshwater associations—after all, Enki's *apsu* appears to have descended from the undifferentiated saltwater mother, and he never fully lost that association. As for Okeanos, what can consider Matthews's (2001) description: "Dionysus becomes an old man and passes into the Underworld in search of knowledge. While he undertakes this shamanic activity he is known as Okeanus, in which form he appears as a bearded head, wreathed in ivy and vines" (p. 32). Anderson (1990) offered an even more detailed description of this image—which is furthermore significant in that it represents perhaps the oldest example of the Green Man as foliate mask, found in none other than these Greek portrayals of the aged Dionysius: his soul on the edge of its underworldly descent. As Anderson (1990) wrote:

On many tombs foliate heads, serious and watchful, full of the tiredness of harvest, await transformation—they are the aged Dionysos about to go to the other life. In the

pediments we see what the god will be transformed into: the leaf-rayed, open-eyed god Okeanos, surrounded by dolphins, who is the goal of the souls in the boat and into whom they will be merged to become part of his universal immortality. (p. 48)

Juxtaposed in this way, the identification of Okeanos with Dionysius is made quite explicit. Furthermore, if one wishes to think of Okeanos as simply a god of the sea, then why should he be wreathed in ivy and vines? This makes little sense for a saltwater god—unless his sea is in fact the buried ocean of the underworldly waters, not a salty ocean at all but that other great reservoir, the one that pours forth into the rivers and streams across the land, much like the ivy and the vines that writhe across the face of Okeanos. In evaluating this comparison, one should also consider another of Enki's most traditional portrayals:

Enki is usually pictured with two streams, the Euphrates and the Tigris, flowing out of his shoulders or from a vase he holds. Frequently fish are swimming in these streams ... and his foot may rest on an ibex, emblem of sweet underground springs, the Apsû. (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 111)

The comparison between the Okeanos leaf-mask, with its writhing ivy and vines, and the visage of Enki, with its flowing

Tigris and Euphrates, certainly presents a striking parallel—so if the parallel holds, and if in Greek esoterica the aged Okeanos was partnered with the young Dionysius, then who would be Enki's surface-world partner? There is one obvious candidate: it is Dumuzi, who like Dionysius in Greece was the most well-known and popular figure of the exuberant ecological god of youth and fertility. Regarding Dumuzi, one should really say "figures" rather than "figure," for there were in fact many Dumuzis varying in form by local ecologies—such variations are discussed in the next chapter. One such Dumuzi in particular stands out as a link with Enki, in parallel to the Athenians' Dionysius of the Swamps—that is, namely, "Dumuzi-abzi, the power to renew life in the watery deep" (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 25). The link to Enki, in such a case, would be hard to dispute.

More generally, across many locales, the various Dumuzis tended—like Dionysius—to be associated with wellsprings and rivers. Langdon (1914) saw this as Dumuzi's primary role, for as a "youthful god who represents the birth and death and nature" (p. 5), Dumuzi was generally to be identified with "the beneficent waters which flooded the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates in the late winter, and which ebbed away, and nearly disappeared, in the canals and rivers in the period of Summer drought" (p. 5). One sees here how seasonal renewal and the

ebbs and flows of the underworldly waters were associated within the fertility god's numen. Such a motif was certainly present from early times, and would only have been further emphasized as irrigation and grain agriculture became increasingly central to civilization.

How clearly did the ancients perceive the connection between the river's ebbs and flows and the invisible groundwater reservoirs, hidden beneath the earth? Perhaps the relation between Enki and Dumuzi was not always evident or clear, but in the figure of Dumuzi-abzi, at least, it seems to have been made explicit. Like Dionysius Limnaios, Dumuzi-abzi appears as a kind of bridge, one called by the name of the youthful Dumuzi but found in the wetlands like the underworldly Enki. Indeed, this association between Dumuzi-abzi and Enki was evident, for as Langdon (1914) summarized:

We find therefore that the theologians regarded this youthful divinity as belonging to the cult of Eridu, centre of the worship of Ea [Enki], lord of the nether sea. ... He appears in the great theological list as *Dami-zi, ab-zu*, "Tammuz of the nether sea," *i.e.*, "the faithful son of the fresh waters which come from the earth." (p. 5)

As one fits these pieces together, overlaying the mythic associations with ecological water cycles, a continuum of figures

appears. The river flows from Enki's *apsu* through the liminal wetlands and into the valleys of the Dumuzis of agriculture and horticulture—and eventually back into the depths of ocean and underworld once again. In Greece, the exuberant young Dionysius bubbles up from the swamp and intoxicates the world—but eventually becomes, as he reaches the underworldly depths, Okeanos—an old man wreathed in ivy and vines. In the new year, at *Anthesteria* in fact, he would once more return to his youthful form, bubbling up again in the springs and in the swamps that were considered his ancient home.

This situates the importance of the temple portal of “Dionysius of the Swamps,” where the people welcomed the god back and drank him in, so to speak, as both the new year's wine and the sacred water of the wellspring. In the case of “Dumuzi-abzi, the power to renew life in the watery deep” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 25), the specifics of myth and ritual have long been lost—but like Dionysius Limnaios, Dumuzi-abzi seems to have been a liminal figure, a borderlander—halfway between Dumuzi and Enki, between the annually renewing waters of the surface world and the ancient depths from which they welled up. In any case, the parallelism of these gods in Greece and Sumer appears to be quite compelling: the exuberant young god, from

Eridu to Athens, is revealed also as the keeper of the hidden underworldly depths.

The Ancient Son of the Ancestral Waters

I began this chapter with the question of origins. Perhaps it is where people lack a sense of mythic ground that they most passionately seek for literal origination. This can easily become fundamentalism, patriotism, “defense of homeland.” People lacking mythic ground may be willing to defend the mirage of territory wherever they imagine they can stake a claim, doing what is deemed necessary to stave off the disorienting vertigo of rootlessness. If this is the case, then our modern era more than any other may need the mythic power of revitalizing waters, which seem to relate, in a deeper sense, to the feeling of source.

The oldest of such waters might have belonged to an undifferentiated cosmic mother—the Sumerian Nammu or Babylonian Tiamat—an undivided immensity of a primordial age. Yet, even if one wished, one could not return to life in that primordial ocean. The Babylonians said that King Marduk carved Tiamat into the differentiated world as we know it—a world full of varieties and distinctions. Even in the gentler Sumerian rendition, Nammu’s age has clearly passed, for she gave up her primordial unity through the very act of birthing her children: the earth, who was her daughter Ki; the sky, who

was her son Anu; and her firstborn—that hidden dimension of the fluid groundwater that is beneath all things—who was called Enki, or *apsu*.

Perhaps, then, Nammu lives on in the manner of all ancestors—through the lineage carried by children, a lineage that might be described as a kind of subterranean presence flowing always beneath the skin. Enki, especially, was the true son of his mother, and his realm was the one that most resembled her own. There is a resonance between the floating, dreamlike, subterranean *apsu* and the original mother's primordial sea. Perhaps *apsu* is, in part, the lingering ancestral presence of what was once universal—the waters that once literally covered the earth.

That primordial ocean no longer covers the world, and for humankind the experience of the evolutionary womb has given way to one that includes distinction and separation. Yet if Nammu represents this oceanic ancestry in the past, *apsu* may represent it as a buried dimension of the present—for the rivers are always under our feet and in our blood. The rivers swim in our veins and in the veins of that which feeds us, that is, in our food ecologies. In this sense, the oceanic source never dried up or vanished, but only went underground; the waters are still nourishing us from where they lie beneath the surface of things.

Here one finds the cosmological image: in going inside things, in going underground, the original liquid ancestry has become encoded both in the water cycles and, it seems, in the more esoteric fluidity of life's evolutionary continuance. That is, ancestry is a river from a hidden source much like the literal rivers that pour forth from wellsprings. Hence, for the Sumerians, *apsu* was also semen, and the earth was also a womb. Cosmologically speaking, the soil of this world is a great Goddess—as detailed in subsequent chapters, she is a cross-cultural presence, but among the Sumerians she would have been Nammu's daughter, Ki—a goddess with the womblike power to give rise to life when touched by the seminal waters that bubble up pure from the ancient depths. While semen may seem a distinctly masculine force, it is notable that *apsu* was also so close to Nammu, the primordial mother, and so to the inheritance of the past. In this sense, while masculine, it is also part of a power beyond gender, prior to gender: the universal power of life's ancestry to continue begetting itself.

Some of this is particularly Sumerian: for example the *apsu* as a kind of potent lake buried everywhere beneath the ground is a fairly specific Sumerian image. The vision, however, of wellsprings and rivers carrying a kind of seminal essence for the flowering of the earth's womb-like soil is a very broad

mythos—for one touches here on the universality of the waters of life. One may note, here, that *nature* and *natal* share an etymological root—life is, in part, an endless birth, a springing forth from watery womb or hidden wellspring. As Weston (1920/1997) observed: “The original source of such a symbol [the waters of life] is most probably to be found in the belief ... that all life comes from water” (p. 126). Whether this is viewed in terms of the undifferentiated water of a primordial age, as in the oceans of Tiamat or Nammu, or in terms of the freshly upwelling groundwater that makes life everywhere possible and therefore is also its source, the quest for life’s origination seems to dive again and again into the fluid depths.

Perhaps this is no less the case in the quest for the origination of culture. For the Sumerians, the *apsu* was more than a reservoir for the nourishment of vegetation. Like the river spirit nymphs of later Greece—like the Muses themselves, who could generally only be found at wellsprings—such waters do not only inseminate vegetal growth but also the flourishing of culture, art, dreams, and so forth, so that the *apsu* appears to have been a reservoir for psychical as well as vegetal upwellings. In one major myth of the founding of Sumerian civilization, it was from the *apsu*—from Enki’s secret subterranean library—that the goddess Inanna, benefactress of humankind, retrieved the clay

tablets on which all the secrets of civilization were stored (Dalley, 2nd millenium B.C.E./1991). This is to say, when the Sumerians sought the origination of their own cultural ancestry, they found their answer in myth: and, specifically, in the mythic depths of the ancient and underworldly waters of life.

Much has been argued about appropriate use of the term “indigenous.” Perhaps one should not be surprised to find that indigeneity is slippery¹—for it is a concept intrinsically related to origins, and therefore to tracking up the slick mud and stones of the ancestral riverbed. Perhaps the difficulty of identifying what is and isn’t indigenous comes down, again, to the mirage of origination—that is, the illusion of vanishing points. Only now, perhaps one can venture something of what the Sumerians might say about the vanishing point of a river—for the

¹ I have also grappled, throughout this work, with the question of the capitalization of “indigenous.” Indigeneity, in contemporary usage, slips between its meanings as a universal concept and its now-politicized dimensions as a proper noun describing a loose and messily-defined affiliation of cultures through time. Defining membership within this latter category is a political affair and not my interest—thus, against the current grain, I have retained usage of the lower-case “indigenous” to refer to universal concepts of indigeneity. I use the upper-case “Indigenous” only with respect to specific peoples and bodies of thought that have identified themselves as such.

Sumerians knew that at those vanishing points, the wellsprings, the waters went underground, into a source that is common and autochthonous to the land itself.

If Indigenous motifs and mythic patterns are to be imagined like this, then one could not expect to pinpoint a literal origin, but only to describe visible instantiations: the places that the patterns of symbols have most memorably risen up, such as in ancient Sumer and Classical Greece. One may call such cultural flourishings the wellsprings of culture—not an original source, but a perspectival vanishing point. Hence, as Bottéro (2001) described the contributions of Sumer: “The cosmology was part of the cultural heritage, which was as old as the religion itself; it is impossible to reveal its sources and earlier stages” (p. 78).

Such origins cannot be captured in literal terms, but can be tracked into mythic depths, into places where they seem to well up, much like the water cycles that rise into partnership with the living soil to engender ecologies of life. Such mythically seminal fluids of elemental and vegetal origins—the ancient gods of wellspring, river, and swamp—have been the primary subjects of this chapter. In the next chapter, these mythic forms are further elaborated—much as they might have been elaborated historically—into animal and human expressions of

the same: that is, namely, as the motifs of the sacred bull and the ecological king of the woods.

CHAPTER 4: WILD BULLS OF THE GODDESS

If I was born as a blackthorn tree
I'd wanna be felled by you, held by you
Fuel the pyre of your enemies
(Hozier, 2018)

The Bull and the Cowherd

It is easy to see how the god of the fertile waterways could be one and the same as the god of vegetation. The same power that courses through the rivers and streams can be pictured pulsing up the riverbanks, pulsing into the roots and eventually the leaves and branches of the plant life that grows there. The power of the buried groundwater passes not only through the threshold of the wellsprings to enter the visible world, but also subsequently through the threshold of the soil to become the moistness in plants. Further, the same water also flows through the veins of all life, animal as well as vegetal—thus it makes good sense that for the Sumerians, the word *apsu* implied not only the water and its hidden reservoirs, but also in a more universal sense—as elaborated in subsequent chapters—semen and the seminal principle, the life-giving essence of masculinity.

As the waters of life are perceived to flow beyond the plant world, one discovers that another body of motifs here manifests, just as near to the fertility god, but taking on animal rather than vegetal form. As Frazer (1890/1994) observed, “A feature in the mythical character of Dionysus, which at first sight appears inconsistent with his nature as a deity of vegetation, is that he was often conceived and represented in animal shape, especially ... a bull” (p. 399). Otto (1965) similarly described a “mighty beast in whose bodily form the river gods generally appeared when they emerged from their element, who was so close to Dionysus. ... This is the bull” (p. 165).

In truth, Dionysius was found in many various animal forms, not only that of the bull. He appeared in various myths and portrayals as serpent, dolphin, donkey, leopard, lion, panther, goat, and more. Such a diversity of shapes might seem like sloppy or imprecise mythos, but this is not the case—rather, the fluid dynamism itself is a precise aspect of the god. With the fluidity of his watery origins, Dionysius was always a shapeshifter. As Otto (1965) described:

His ability to transform himself into something else is often stressed. He is the “god of two forms”, the “god of many forms”, “Appear as a bull, or as a many-headed dragon, or as a lion breathing fire!” This is the invocation

of the chorus to Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In the battle against the giants he was a lion. To the daughters of Minyas he appeared in the form of a young girl and suddenly changed himself into a bull, a lion, a panther. (p. 110)

In recognizing such a multiplicity of animal forms, Otto (1965), Frazer (1890/1994), and others have nevertheless afforded a special place to the bull in Dionysian myth and cult. In fact, by the Classical Greek period, the bull was already long-established as an icon of the god of fertility and renewal—from Sumer to Greece and beyond, the bull “was looked upon by ancient peoples as a symbol of fertility and prolific generation, and it was just for this reason that the spirits of nurturing and fertilizing streams had to be depicted in its image” (Otto, 1965, pp. 165–166).

The symbolic link, here, between the river and the bull may seem a bit arbitrary or tenuous at first. Otto (1965) noted several parallels between the two motifs: their roaring power, their wild unpredictability, and most especially their associations with seminal fertility and seasonal renewal. Just as the rivers' ebb and flow results in relative feast and famine for the people who depend on plants foods, so the bull's seminal ebb and flow results in a parallel flux within the cow herds,

which have been an equally or even more important source of sustenance for many peoples in Sumer and beyond depending on the character of local food ecologies. It is in part this seminal significance that Otto (1965) observed: “Thus the bull form of Dionysus again suggests the element of water, which we have perceived to be the carrier and agent of his divine power in nature” (pp. 165–166).

Whether one accepts this particular association or not, it is clear that the bull and the river have shared the distinction of being central motifs in the larger tradition of the male fertility gods. Representation of these gods as bulls has been common in many lands where cow husbandry was a staple, and often even in places where it was not, such as in the example of ancient Enki who was originally the fertility god of a swampland—not a place ideal for cattle ranching—who was nonetheless called “the wild bull of Eridu” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 63). Probably, such associations could take place in ancient Sumer even outside of cattle country because the association of the bull with the fertility god mythos was so strong as to have become a convention. One may note, corroborating this, that the phrase “wild bull” was a widespread formulation in Sumerian religious poetry and song. Indeed, one of the most common forms of

address to the Sumerian fertility god has been rendered as “Wild Bull Dumuzi” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 44).

The Sumerian term for “wild bull” itself held several meanings. As Jacobsen (1976) noted, it was used not only in reference to the god but also for both literal bulls and for the Sumerian men who, like the bulls, could be said to husband the herds—Mesopotamian cowboys, so to speak. With this in mind, the use of the epithet Wild Bull Dumuzi could probably be called the first recorded example of something like “the good shepherd” as a religious icon—for it implied that the god could be seen as both bull and cowherd, as in the parallel Christian symbolism where the good shepherd is also notably the lamb of god. Like the lamb of god, the divine bull was an image with associations of animal sacrifice that in turn represented divine sacrifice—indeed, the tradition of Dumuzi could be said to be as steeped in the grief of divine sacrifice as that of later Christianity. As Jacobsen (1976) summarized:

The shepherds know him as Dumuzi the shepherd and he is considered the son of Duttur, the personified ewe, while among the cowherds he is son of Ninsûna, the “Lady of the wild cows.” The cult comprises both happy celebrations of the marriage of the god with Inanna ... and bitter laments when he dies as the dry heat of summer

yellow the pastures and lambing, calving, and milking
come to an end. (p. 26)

In other words, depending on local food ecologies, Dumuzi would typically die as one animal or another—most classically the bull—in tandem with the waning season. As food abundance began to return in whatever local timing applied—most classically at the end of winter or early spring, but it depended on locality—the god would return, mythically reborn from some distant mountain or deep ocean or underworldly haunt. Knowing that such a seasonal rebirth was coming did not change the peoples’ enthusiastic lamentation of the divine death any more than knowing that the god would die mitigated the celebrations during the seasons of his birth and growth. All of this, more or less, was the centerpiece of Frazer’s (1890/1994) work, such that

by performing certain magical rites [the people] could aid the god, who was the principle of life, in his struggle with the opposing principle of death. They imagined they could recruit his failing energies and even raise him from the dead. ... They now explained the fluctuations of growth and decay, of reproduction and dissolution, by the marriage, the death, and the rebirth or revival of the gods, their religious or rather magical dramas turned in great

measure on these themes. They set forth the fruitful union of the powers of fertility, the sad death of one at least of the divine partners, and his joyful resurrection. (pp. 300–301)

In summary, whether as god, bull, or king, “the dying god” turns out to be an apt enough name for the mythos—though “the courting god” or “the newborn god” might be just as apt, for these latter events occur as frequently in the god’s mythic cycle. Indeed, these three stages, taken together, might be considered as the major beats of the god’s story, who might therefore himself be considered as a *triple god* in this sense: one who is born, one who courts and marries or mates, and one who dies.

One observation that becomes apparent is the instrumental role of goddess figures in each of these phases. Of course, a triple goddess—Mother, Maiden, Crone—has become well-known as a formulation of neo-paganism, and there might be a corollary to be found in this parallel formation of the god. One may note that in birth, the god is born to the mother; in courting, the god is joined with the bride; and in dying, the god reunites with the ancient soil in death—and the cycle begins again. In each case, the Goddess looms large in the life of the god—his alpha and omega, his beginning and end. Nothing in life seems to awaken quite as much passion in him as the

prospect of her—which is saying something regarding a god generally characterized by exuberance, vigor, and passion. As Frazer (1890/1994) summarized:

The [vegetal gods] did not stand by themselves. The mythical personification of nature, of which all [vegetal gods] were in at least one aspect the products, required that each of them should be coupled with a goddess, and in each case it appears that originally the goddess was a more powerful and important personage than the god. (p. 390)

I would suggest that comparing the relative importance of intimate partners is nonsensical—but putting this aside, a broader point regarding the Goddess' power and omnipresence in the life of the god does stand. One could say that Wild Bull Dumuzi is not just any wild bull—but could more specifically be called the Wild Bull of the Goddess. In the typical Sumerian version of the mythos, he would be born to a mother goddess—who might be called Inanna, but if the newborn god was named Dumuzi, then usually either the divine mother would go unnamed or some other mother figure like the aforementioned goddesses Duttur or Ninsûna would tend to appear instead. One imagines such replacement was to avoid implications of intergenerational incest, for birth and infancy were generally

followed by subsequent youthful adventures that, if survived, culminated in courtship and “happy celebrations of the marriage of the god with Inanna” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 26). Thus, if Dumuzi was to wed Inanna, he should probably not also be born to her; as described in later chapters, confusion on this point often arose in later versions of this myth-form. In any case, the lovers’ wedded bliss would always soon be cut short, for the groom could expect to meet an early death in parallel with the patterns of seasonal waning, and the freshly widowed Inanna would be left to lead the “bitter laments” (p. 26) that signaled the end of the ecological year.

While other forms of the dying god were also known in Sumer, Wild Bull Dumuzi was particularly popular, not only as an image of the god in life and marriage but also particularly in his death—that is, as the dying god. Bulls have of course long been prized as religious sacrifices, and Wild Bull Dumuzi would be to the earliest recorded example of this. One may consider, for example, the reconstructed Sumerian ritual lament entitled “The Wild Bull Who Has Lain Down”:

The wild bull who has lain down, lives no more,
the wild bull who has lain down,
lives no more,
Dumuzi, the wild bull, who has lain down,
lives no more, ...
the chief shepherd, lives no more,
the wild bull who has lain down, lives no more ...

I will ask the hills and the valleys
I will ask the hills of the Bison:
“Where is the young man, my husband?”
I will say;
“he whom I no longer serve food?”
I will say;
“he whom I no longer give drink?” (excerpted in Jacobsen,
1976, p. 53)

This hymn is clearly about Wild Bull Dumuzi, and particularly about his death—but who is meant to be the singer? The answer can only be the one who would call Dumuzi “my husband”—that is to say, the goddess Inanna herself. The ritual singer, in other words, must have taken on the role of the goddess during the performance, which was thus not simply an expression of human emotion but rather the goddess’ own grief. Whether the singer took on this role only for the duration of the song or for the duration of the festival, or for an even longer period, there is no way to know. One can only infer based on the ancient lyrics that the ritual singer was in the character of the goddess during the vocal rendition.

What is more clearly apparent from the hymn’s content is that, no less than for his birth and his marriage, the presence of the goddess filled the event of the dying god’s demise. In other words, in each of these most intimate of moments—not only in birth and love, but also in death—Wild Bull Dumuzi was fully involved with Inanna. The mythos, it becomes increasingly clear,

cannot be said to belong solely to the Goddess or the Green Man—it was, from the earliest examples in Mesopotamia, a partnership. Thus, one cannot seek for long to understand the god without turning, like the Green Man himself, toward the Goddess and toward the cocreative partnership that entwined the two.

Lovers in the Forest, Lovers in the Grain

Inanna's worship among the Sumerians was uniquely durable. Jacobsen (1976) described three phases of Sumerian religion—in the first, Dumuzi-type fertility gods were paramount, while in the last, this male paramouncy had transitioned toward despotic warrior-kings. Yet, unlike Dumuzi whose prominence faded as the warrior gods rose, Inanna remained a thoroughly queenly icon throughout. One might say that while the archetype of male chieftancy changed hands, the Goddess remained a more resilient presence, at least through the Sumerian period. One possible explanation for this is the fact that in the face of urbanization, Inanna's worship was able to thrive in country and city alike; from country origins, Inanna's temples—unlike those of her “Will Bull” partner—were able to find a home within the new cities' walls.

Why wasn't Inanna displaced by the growing city religions in the same way as her partner? The robust survival of Inanna—

even continuing into the widespread worship of Ishtar among the subsequent Babylonians—may have had something to do with her close association with grain agriculture. While Dumuzi was certainly connected to agriculture in the sense that his rivers provided irrigation, a more particular association with grain was stronger for Inanna. In this context, urban peoples' particular dependence on grain agriculture may have only propelled the Goddess to increasing prominence.

Inanna, according to Jacobsen (1976), was not so much the goddess of grain per se but rather the goddess of grain storage, that is, the “numen of the storehouse” (p. 141). As Bellah (2011) observed, many of the most difficult challenges for people transitioning toward grain-dependent food economies involve not so much issues of growing as issues of storage and protection of grain surplus, and thus it is interesting that Inanna seems to be associated with a number of responses to just such challenges. There was, for example, the storehouse technology itself, with its methods of keeping grain dry and edible throughout the winter and into the new year. Relatedly, two cats famously flank the goddess in many of her portrayals—and as Jacobsen (1976) noted, cats are peerless protectors of grain silos when it comes to the issue of rodents.

Perhaps there is some truth, then—mythically, at least—to Sjöö and Mor's (1987) claim: "Women built the first granaries and storehouses for provisions. ... Women domesticated the cat to protect these granaries from rodents" (p. 35). With this in mind, it is also notable that Inanna was not only considered a fertility goddess but also a goddess of battle—a combination that may be surprising until one realizes that with large grain surpluses conveniently processed and stored in one place, the incentive for raiders and the need for defense multiplies. Thus, this aspect of Inanna as a battle goddess may also emerge from her association with the storage and protection of grain—not only rodents, but also raiders, grow up along with the grain fields to become an enduring threat to the goddess' silos and the people who depend on them.

Jacobsen (1976) saw such grain economies as the fundamental context for partnership between Inanna and Dumuzi. Where Dumuzi who was the fertility of plants met with Inanna who was the power of harvest and storehouse, there grain-based civilization could be born. Such a theory would at least help account for why Dumuzi's popularity might decline in the later Sumerian period as urban people grew increasingly dissociated from the ecological and agricultural forces of rural regions, while Inanna's storehouses remained quite literally

central to city life. One could draw a parallel here to modern people who know grocery stores all-too-well while alienated from the farms that provision them—urban Sumerians might have similarly worshipped their grain silo goddess long after they'd begun to neglect her wilder aspects and her equally wild ancient partner.

While perhaps a neat account, this is probably a gross oversimplification. After all, as suggested by many of the examples already given, the divine pairing of fertility gods like Inanna and Dumuzi far predates the popularization of grain economies in Mesopotamia, so it would seem that grain motifs could only have been a latecoming aspect of a more ancient tradition. Inanna could hardly be defined as “numen of the storehouse” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 141) when she herself predated storehouse technologies; one would venture that her earlier associations probably encompassed and included the storehouse symbolism from an originally broader body of meanings.

In fact, I have already suggested a candidate for such originally broader meanings: namely, the previous chapter's traditional formulations of the ecological Goddess and God along the lines of the soil and the river that engenders it. One can see how the mythos of grain agriculture would quite naturally extend from such origins in vegetal fertility—grain is,

after all, just one example of such plant growth. Irrigation, which was key to the cultivation of the Mesopotamian flood plains, would seem to represent little more than human ingenuity joining into this ancient dance between the life-giving forces of earth and water. Yet, while it is easy to imagine how the old fertility gods could quite naturally become gods of the grain, Inanna's specific development into goddess of the storehouse requires a deeper look. To that end, there is another form of Dumuzi that one should consider: the god known as Damu.

The name Damu is a diminutive form of Dumuzi—"Little Dumuzi," one might say—and indeed, Damu appeared as a child god. He was, furthermore, especially linked with early spring, which is the season in which Dumuzi would be most likely to be seen as youthful, newly born from the depths. Damu, who was associated especially with orchards and fruit trees, was said to represent "the power in the rising sap" (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27)—that is, the power in the awakening spring, in green wood, in vibrant young vegetal life.

Somewhere between the latent seminal potentials represented in a god like Enki—the unborn *apsu*, the winter groundwater—and the mature expression of life found in the adult fertility god—whether in arboreal or horned form—one

might imagine the child of spring, life born from the earth's womb but not yet grown into adulthood. Thus Damu, "Little Dumuzi," comes into view. In other words, Damu would represent another aspect of the god's triplicity: the child of the mother. "The power in the rising sap" (p. 27) seems to become, here, quite an exact phrase—for it describes the movement from the groundwaters beneath the earth into the moisture of plants to eventually become the mature vegetal life that is precisely the seminal potential of the groundwaters manifested.

The energy of the waters can thus be said, mythically, to journey from Enki through Damu and into Dumuzi, before vanishing through the god's ritual death back into underworldly potentials. In the dark and wintry underworld, the waters once more become Enki—or, as the later Greeks would call him, Okeanos, into whom the "aged Dionysius" (Anderson, 1990, p. 48) was said to transform upon his death and descent. The god's life cycle, in other words, was the same as that of the water cycle—and the fact that Damu was called "the power in the rising sap" (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27) illustrates that this water cycle included time within the flesh of plants—and, with a bit more imagination, also within the flesh of animals.

This imagery is clearer with plants, for in the case of vegetation, the soil seems to quite literally hold the seed like a

womb and also provide its birth channel into life—as well as its grave of decomposition through which the waters of the “rising sap” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27) cycle back into their elemental existence as earth and moisture once again. However, this same cycle remains fundamentally the case whether the mortal life in question is manifesting as green shoots of vegetation, a newborn calf, or a human child—as indeed, each of these motifs is found represented in the mythos of Damu and Dumuzi. All such expressions of life, in other words, are ultimately born and fed from the Goddess of the soil—and each can also be described as ways in which the god of the living waters moves through the threshold of birth, rises into life, and returns eventually into elemental depths.

One should note, here, that the soil seems to have a perduring and stable quality relative to the endlessly dynamic cycles of water and mortal lives. The same soil that anchored the life of one’s ancestors, however many generations ago, is the soil making life possible today. Of course, the world’s waters are also eternal, as is the dying god—yet his is an eternal cycle, here and gone, as the rivers ebb and flow with the seasons. In contrast to this, the Goddess and the soil seems timeless—hence, one finds that the mythic partner of the god of rivers and wellsprings is none other than the Goddess of soil and

mountains. Alongside dancing Shiva in Hinduism one finds Parvati, “the Lady of the Mountains” (Evans, 1988, p. 130). As for the Greek Dionysius, his name literally meant “The God of Nysa” (p. 131), for Nysa was the name of his sacred mountain, the original location of which had already been long-forgotten by the time of the Classical Greeks. Yet, if one were to venture a leading contender for this mountainous origin, it would probably be Minoan Crete, where the early prototype of the Greek god of ecstasy appears to have been closely associated and partnered with the mysterious mountain Goddess of that civilization. As Sjöö and Mor’s (1987) theorized:

The ecstasy cult of Dionysus originated in Crete. It was the cult of the Great Goddess ... and even as they celebrated the birth of the young male God Dionysus in the birth cave, he was always known as the son of the Great Mother. (pp. 212-213) While any verification of claims about Minoan religion is difficult given that the Minoan script has never been translated, some substantiation is found in the imagery of surviving art. There is, for example, the famous bronze seal of Knossos, which features the Minoan Goddess atop a mountain abode. As Kerényi (1976) described the seal: “In the background we discern a mountain sanctuary; and facing the goddess is a male figure looking up at her and greeting her. The mountain is

flanked by two lions” (p. 7). One immediately recognizes the image of the flanking cats, as found in the portrayals Inanna from millennia before—and indeed, as reviewed in subsequent chapters, Inanna was just as profoundly linked as the Minoan Goddess to motifs of mountains and their forests of sacred trees.

Given the problems of translation, one has no way of knowing what the Minoans might have called their Goddess nor the mountain upon which the bronze seal portrays her enthroned—but at the very least, if one accepts the likelihood of Minoan influences on subsequent Dionysian religion, then the meaning of the Greek name Dionysius as “God of Mount Nysa” may here receive some elaboration. That is—as the smaller male god approaches the sacred mountain and its Goddess, “looking up at her and greeting her” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 7), so seems quite possible that the mountain itself originally belonged to the Goddess as much as or more than to the God. Dionysius may originally have been the God of Mount Nysa insofar as he was its eternal queen’s lover, partner, and son—in his variously cycling roles—extending from her mountainous realm into the living world much as green vegetation sprouts from the ancient soil.

To consider all of this together, it would seem that the duality between an eternal mountainous Goddess and an ever-

dying God was already quite firmly in place by the time that the grain economies of Sumer rose to prominence, and hence was available to lend itself neatly to the emerging mythos of the grain and storehouse. For the storehouse is not only a protected stockpile of food, it is also the preservation of the seed crop for the next generation of life. The storehouse, like the soil itself, is therefore a kind of intergenerational persistence—and in this persistence it enables life to persist. In carrying the seeds of the next generation through the winter, almost as if gestating their birth, the storehouse is like a womb for the continued life of both the seeds and the humans who depend on them.

Thus, the storehouse goddess is also the Mother Goddess of all life: namely, Inanna. As the vegetal god widows his wife in the winter, so he is reborn again to his mother in the spring, but now with the additional participation of the human-built womb: the grain storehouse. In rooting the partnership in its more ancient roots of soil and water, it is more clear why it would be that it was Inanna who always mourned Dumuzi's death in the hymns of ritual lamentation and not vice versa—for this was the case not only in Sumer but more or less in all examples of the fertility partnership for millennia to come. As Frazer (1890/1994) put it: "At all events it is always the god rather than

the goddess who comes to a sad end, and whose death is annually mourned" (p. 390).

Perhaps this is the deeper insight behind Frazer's (1890/1994) observation that "originally the goddess was a more powerful and important personage than the god" (p. 390). Power and import are rather subjective descriptors, but measured by immensity and durability it seems fair to say that the mountain, the soil, and the Earth itself dwarf the mortal life that plays across them. In the grand mystic vision of the mountain—in the geological eye, one might say—entire ecologies may seem like little green animals dancing briefly across the Earth as they live, evolve, and die: Green Men, indeed. As the grain crop was harvested each year while the soil and the storehouse endured, so the ancient forest, the ecosystem itself, may seem but a pulse in a continuous dance across eons.

Bly (1990) described this dynamic very well—for while he wrote of the tradition's expression among the Classical Greeks, some four thousand years after early Sumer, the central themes of the mythos appear as strikingly robust:

at that time all vegetation—flowers, grass, wheat, grapes, lettuce—was imagined to be male. Since we say "Earth

Mother,” we, if we think of it at all, assume that vegetation is female. For them it was male. ...

The earth lives through the year; the leaves fall. The earth lives forever; the “vegetable world” dies. The Great Mother, like the earth, lives on and on, year after year, but the green vegetation dies in the summer heat and again in the winter cold. ... “The Gardens of Adonis last but a day” was a line in an old tune.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream

Bears all its sons away. (p. 214)

Enaction, Incorporation, and Avatarship

This ever-dying quality of the Green Man is part of what links his mythos to the widespread tradition that Frazer (1890/1994) termed “Kings of the Wood.” Such Kings, in *The Golden Bough*, are considered as ritual stand-ins for the fertility god himself—the deity’s mortal representatives. As such, the Kings rarely appear to have any powers of governance, but rather exist primarily for the sake of their ceremonial life and death. This raises some questions: What makes the Kings of the Wood kingly at all? For that matter, what is at all majestic about a god who dies not once, but again and again?

Does the dying god go willingly to his death? One imagines that he wouldn’t enjoy the prospect any more than

anyone else. Probably, choice and preference has nothing to do with it—for if one thinks of the dying god as an archetype of mortality itself, then just as plant and animal life must live and die, so the task of eternally living and dying would be intrinsic to the god's function. One cannot very well represent participation in mortality without oneself personally participating in life and death. Someone—or more accurately, some myth—must lead the mortal charge. Such would be part of this god's burden and role.

Perhaps this is why the dying god is never caught dragging his feet when approaching his fate, but seems always to be meeting life and death with “the power in the rising sap” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27), or the vigorous charge of the “mighty beast ... who was so close to Dionysus ... the bull” (Otto, 1965, p. 165). The symbols of the god overflow thus with vitality, like the bubbling wellspring itself; perhaps this is just how much vitality is required to navigate the mortal challenge with divinity. Perhaps demonstrating the possibility of a life and death with such divine enthusiasm is a part of what the dying god offers as guide to consciousness—for as has been seen, Wild Bull Dumuzi was both the bull and the shepherd, the guide. *Enthusiasm*, in its Greek roots, literally means to be filled by god-presence (Merriam-Webster, 2022)—and what god could

demonstrate how to bring the divine spirit into the midst of mortal life more than one who personally joins in the living and the dying?

Perhaps more than any other deity, the dying god is seen across various cultures to directly participate in incorporation through mortal bodies and mortal lives. Such incorporation should be familiar to Westerners as a mythic motif—for Jesus Christ exemplified the same. It is, however, one thing to imagine such a possibility as a legendary theological event; the notion is quite different when considering the incorporation of a spiritual presences as a human potential that could be experienced by oneself or one's neighbors. Yet, this was the situation in cultures from which such myths and legends have arisen—in such contexts, a god taking on human form was not simply a legendary occurrence, but rather something people could occasionally witness, and by corollary, something which certain people at least could experience.

Incorporation may be defined as the blurring of separation between human experience and spiritual beings, such that a spiritual presence manifests itself directly through the life, mind, and body of a mortal. This is much more likely to be considered as possible in cultures that perceive spiritual realities as nearby and interwoven with the normal dimensions

of human experience, and much less likely in cultures that have undergone either secular disenchantment or the removal of spiritual realities to some distant transcendental plane. In more animistic cultures, spiritual presences of all kinds are not distant characters or symbolic abstractions, but are rather seen as intimately and influentially involved in natural and human affairs. In this vein, Hallowell (1960/2002) coined the term *other than human persons* to describe the general category of such nonhuman agencies, including mythic figures and gods, which such cultures have considered as dwelling nearby, indeed dwelling even in the midst of human life:

One might say: all other “persons”—human or other than human—are structured the same as I am. ... All other “persons,” too, have such attributes as self-awareness and understanding. I can talk with them. Like myself, they have personal identity, autonomy, and volition. I cannot always predict exactly how they will act, although most of the time their behavior meets my expectations. In relation to myself, other “persons” vary in power. Many of them have more power than I have, but some have less. They may be friendly and help me when I need them but, at the same time, I have to be prepared for hostile acts, too. I

must be cautious in my relations with other “persons”
because appearances may be deceptive. (pp. 41–42)

It is in this context that traditions of incorporation may best be understood. Incorporation—unlike, say, a loaded term like “possession”—is a morally neutral phenomenon with potential for both risks and rewards. To take one example, mask-dancing in many traditions has origins in spiritual technologies of intentional incorporation. Frazer (1890/1994) noted that amidst tribes of the American Northwest, initiates of mask-dancing were first welcomed into the practice not by human teachers but by spiritual presences themselves, who might initially manifest into the body of an untrained and unexpected initiate. However, by deliberately learning to yield their experience and their physicality to the spirit through the context of the ritual dance, such initiates formed a symbiotic relationship characterized by mutual benefit: the spirit was now able to enjoy incorporate form, and the adept gained a portion of the spirit’s knowledge and power. In Frazer’s (1890/1994) summary:

The gift of this dance means that the protégé of the spirit is to perform the same dances which have been shown to him [by the spirit]. In these dances he personates the spirit. He wears his mask and his ornaments. Thus the

dance must be considered a dramatic performance of the myth relating to the acquisition of the spirit, and shows to the people that the performer by his visit to the spirit has obtained his powers and desires. (p. 653)

Most of the time, both the experience of incorporation and the powers thereby gained are primarily confined to the ritual context. That is, in daily life, the mask-dancer does not usually go around as the spirit incarnate, but rather as a more or less ordinary member of the community who is known as something like a friend or ally of certain beings in the spiritual world. Continuous incarnate godhood would seem rather more difficult to sustain, both for the society and for the channel. Ritual is a constrained event for a reason: its intense emotions, dramatic relations, larger-than life characters, and other costs of time, effort, and material are all expensive. After ritual, people must generally return to their daily lives and livelihoods.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule of temporal constraint. Hindu *avatāra*, for example—and the *bodddhisatva* or *buddha* successors of this tradition in many branches of Buddhism—are typically understood either as divine beings for all their lives or at least for the rest of their lives after a certain spiritual attainment is reached. Similarly, Christian liturgy describes Jesus's whole life, from mysterious birth and

miraculous powers to ritual death, as an unceasing divine incarnation. Yet such ideas originate first neither in Christian liturgy nor in any *Veda*—rather, one finds evidence of sustained incorporation in the oldest records of mythic traditions, as in Frazer’s (1890/1994) many examples of the Kings of the Wood.

The specifics regarding the Kings have varied immensely. A mortal enactment of the dying god might in one country be a slave or captive who was simply called “king” for a day prior to being sacrificed, while in another country the channel might be revered for years, functioning in various offices as priest, healer, shaman, and so on. The latter case would certainly seem to present a more feasible possibility that the mortal in question is having an actual spiritual experience, and is also more likely in this case to be expected to demonstrate the reality of that experience through demonstrations of magical or physical powers. To take one example, Frazer (1890/1994) described the Mashona tribesman who was considered the avatar of the local fertility god, and as such was expected to provide an annual demonstration of divinely inspired physical abilities:

This Mashona god was formerly bound to render an annual tribute to the king of the Matabele in the shape of four black oxen and one dance. ... For three mortal hours, without a break, to the banging of the tambourine, the

click of castanettes, and the drone of a monotonous song, the swarthy god engaged in a frenzied dance, crouching on his hams like a tailor, sweating like a pig, and bounding about with an agility which testified to the strength and elasticity of his divine legs. (p. 67)

This would seem to be a case of spiritual enthusiasm: the vigor of the divine bull has manifested into the body of the mortal man. Yet, for all his spiritual and physical powers, there is an additional note that one can draw from this description of the Mashona avatar: that is, while he may be considered a King of the Wood, he commands no political rule. In fact, his supernal performance was owed as tribute to the “king of the Matabele” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 67).

Such a development of political subservience can occur in a variety of ways. As in Sumer, the ancient paramouncy of the male fertility gods may be displaced by new kinds of political kings and their warrior gods—conquerors from within or without—so that the avatars of the former tradition are demoted to religious or ceremonial roles only (c.f. Bellah, 2011). In this context, the submission of the Mashona avatar to the political chief is probably the only thing that allows him to continue to exist. Notably, this is not really a feudal arrangement of one ruler submitting to another, for Kings of the Wood were not

rulers. This is surely the only reason it was possible, as in the Mashona case, for there to be the momentary appearance of two kings—for with the proper formalities of political obeisance, the conqueror could potentially seize political power while allowing the magico-religious king to continue in ceremonial functions.

So what is kingship? My suggestion is that it must be understood as two related but very distinct roles. The former, that of magico-religious and ecological function, has fallen out of disuse—for its prestige as the original paramount masculinity and steward of the ecological realm was usurped by politically ambitious upstart warlords. It is this latter category that has come to dominate the image of kingship in later history—while appropriating much of the symbolism and mythos of the original office. As Bellah (2011) put forth in considerable detail, the original kings performed their role in societies that tended be relatively egalitarian, which was possible because, as Gottner-Abendoth (1980/1995) put it, “Apart from [the ecological king’s] ceremonial obligations he performed only administrative duties” (p. 5). This may be a bit reductive, at least in some cases, for an avatar-king’s spiritual powers and influences are often taken as considerable and to be called on by compatriots and dependents in a variety of ways (c.f. Frazer, 1890/1994)—but the point that such kings did not rule is well-supported.

To summarize, the original kings can generally be described not as warrior-rulers, but as the ceremonial enactors of the mythos of the dying god. They were kings because the dying god was the original paramount masculine: that is, the partner of the fertility Goddess and the steward of the ecological realm. This stewardship was predominantly a magico-religious affair—that is to say, the kings had primarily spiritual or shamanic responsibilities. Thus, to understand Frazer's (1890/1994) following description, one must transform one's understanding of what kingdoms, monarchies, and sovereigns once entailed:

The idea that early kingdoms are despotisms in which the people exist only for the sovereign, is wholly inapplicable to the monarchies we are considering. On the contrary, the sovereign in them exists only for his subjects; his life is only valuable so long as he discharges the duties of his position by ordering the course of nature for his people's benefit. (p. 138)

Even terms like “priest-king” may be here misleading, for the Kings of the Wood were not often a member of any religious hierarchy nor necessarily even possessed of any specialist magico-religious training, as in the manner of a shaman. After all, in principle, all that is required to be an incorporate channel

is to be selected and inhabited by a potent spirit—which is why in some cases the role could even be filled by an unwilling victim, such as a slave or captive slated for sacrifice, as in many of Frazer's (1890/1994) examples. Such cases reinforce the fact that, while many Kings of the Wood may have been spiritual adepts, such mastery of techniques or esoterica was not the deciding factor—for a god could, potentially, inhabit even a total neophyte. One did not even necessarily need to be a follower of the god. As Assmann (1996/2003) put it, in the earliest period of Egypt, "the king *is* Horus, in that he enacts Horus rather than worships him" (pp. 231–232).

To reconsider the original meaning of kingship is not to justify the tyrannies of so much of later history. Quite to the contrary, it is a recognition that such despotic tyrannies usurped much of their early legitimacy from the ecological kings whom they supplanted. Of course, one might be at the point of dismissing kings altogether—but nevertheless, it seems worth noting that the image and role of the sacral king does predate the patriarchal state. Such an exploration may in fact have value for aspects of liberation from constrictive patriarchal gender roles—for it demonstrates that there was an ancient model of empowered and kingly masculinity that was prepatriarchal, that was ecologically centered, and that cocreated extensively with

figures of the Goddess. With this mind, one may consider Frazer's (1890/1994) following description:

If he reigned, it was not in the city, but in the greenwood. Again his title, King of the Wood, hardly allows us to suppose that he had ever been a king in the common sense of the word. More likely he was a king of nature. (p. 77)

What "king of nature" might imply, exactly, takes some more reflection. To begin, one might ask: what makes the King of the Wood a king at all? For even without connotations of patriarchal rule, the title seems to convey rather a lot of prestige if it amounted, more or less, to a willing or unwilling vessel whose life seems to have concluded quite often in sacrificial death. What, then, is kingly about a king of nature—given that he was neither a warlord wielding powerful violence nor a tyrant commanding the people's rule?

The Goddess's Sovereign Choice

Thus, the King of the Wood was not a conqueror, nor a ruler, nor even necessarily a priest or shaman, but rather a "king of nature" (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 77): a mortal incorporation of the dying god. To follow the logic of the mythos, it makes sense that such mortal incorporation would be required—for only through such a mortal life could the dying

god participate in mortality, and thus be “the dying god.” This role as a channel helps to explain why the King of the Wood was a king at all—for the channeling of this particular god was considered instrumental in the maintenance and renewal of ecological abundance and harmony. As Bellah (2011) wrote:

The [ancient] king, whether as incarnation, son, or servant of the gods, is the key link between humans and the cosmos such that the weakness or absence of the king is a sign of profound cosmic and social disorder; the proper functioning of the king is the primary guarantee of life and peace. (p. 232)

This seems right as far as it goes—but given that the discussion here concerns “the key link between humans and the cosmos,” it becomes necessary to deepen understanding of what cosmos was, exactly, for ancient peoples. While the typical modern view of cosmos is as something “out there”—like outer space, a mathematically ordered and mostly empty void—the fact is that such distant voids and mathematical abstractions were very far from the lives and myths of ancient peoples, whose existence concerned not outer space but thick and intimate lifeworlds. Such ecological lifeworlds are the only sensible “cosmos” for which the ancient kings would have served as “the key link.”

This fact is apparent in the myths and rituals of early Sumer, as for example in the traditional Sumerian hymn “The Blessing of the Bridegroom,” a song written to celebrate Dumuzi’s coronation and kingship. The hymn makes it clear that—besides being a god of wellsprings and the waters of life, of death and ecological renewal, of bulls and cattle herds, and so forth—Dumuzi was also considered to be the divine king, as in the hymn’s opening lines:

Grant him a royal throne, firm in its foundations;
grant him a scepter righting (wrongs in) the land,
grant him the good crown, the turban that
makes a head distinguished. (excerpted in Jacobsen, 1976,
p. 42)

What the hymn proceeds to elucidate is that this kingship emerged not from any dominating power but precisely from Dumuzi’s character as fertility god. The coronation itself can be considered as the ceremony that extended the god’s divine fertility into the mortal realm, thus enchanting the world with renewal and abundance. This magic of ecological renewal—and nothing else—is what made Dumuzi the divine king. In this fact lies the more precise meaning of “key link between humans and the cosmos” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 232), and it has no more to do with a dry and mathematical sense of cosmos than it does with

any coercive or violent rule. Rather, the cosmic order that the original kings safeguarded was the thick and wild ecological order of an abundantly flourishing ecosystem. Thus, what one finds throughout the “Blessing of the Bridegroom” is language of ecological life and vegetal growth:

may there be vines under him,
may there be barley under him,
may there be carp-floods in the river under him ...
may fishes and birds sound off in the marshes under him
...
may deer multiply in the forests under him,
may (well) watered gardens bear honey and wine under
him,
may lettuce and cress grow in the vegetable plots under
him,
may there be long life in the palace under him. (excerpted
in Jacobsen, 1976, p. 42)

This provides, then, one answer to the question of what made the “king of nature” a king at all. This kingliness was not a matter of ruling over others. It was, rather, the power to engender the flourishing of life in the ecosystem, just like that other channel of Dumuzi: the river itself. The role of the sacral king, in other words, stemmed not fundamentally from the

power to kill but from the power to feed—not originally in the sense of bestowing gifts on a favored few, but by representing the renewal of the universal generosity of life itself. This generosity was effected by the birth, life, and death of the fertility god who exemplified the divine enthusiasm of the mortal charge, and who thus had to live and die in every generation. As Frazer (1890/1994) summarized:

In most of the personages who are thus slain in mimicry it is impossible not to recognize representatives of the tree-spirit or spirit of vegetation, as he is supposed to manifest himself in spring. The bark, leaves, and flowers in which the actors are dressed, and the season of the year at which they appear, show that they belong to the same class as the Grass King, King of the May, Jack-in-the-Green, and other representatives of the vernal spirit of vegetation. (p. 278)

This is to say that through the ages, the ceremonial enactors of seasonal renewal—whether they were sacrificed in fact or only in symbol—have always been stand-ins for the Green Man, the dying god, who in ancient Sumer was most often called Dumuzi. Such ceremonies, carried down in the fertility traditions across thousands of years, give context to Bellah’s (2011) assertion that “the proper functioning of the king is the

primary guarantee of life and peace” (p. 232). For originally, such “life and peace” had nothing to do with law or politics, matters which notably make no appearance in “The Blessing of the Bridegroom” (excerpted in Jacobsen, 1976, pp. 41–43), for such matters would only later become associated with the role of kings. The original “kings of nature” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 77) ensured life and peace in a much more primordial way—that is, the same seasonal way as did the fertile rivers and the wellsprings themselves.

Of course, we have already seen that such channels of regenerative vitality did not, mythically, operate alone—rather, they engendered life in partnership with a very feminine soil. As Frazer (1890/1994) put it, the dying gods “did not stand by themselves” but were almost always “coupled with a goddess” (p. 390), who was usually, like Inanna, at least as prominent as the god. Thus, Bellah’s (2011) “key link between humans and the cosmos” (p. 232) takes on an additional layer: for the cosmos of the earth was not only ecological but also, in part, female. By taking on the role of the dying god, the Goddess’ ecosexual partner, the ancient king joined into this partnership with the feminine aspect of the earth.

To put this another way, one could say that it was precisely in union with the ecological Goddess in which the

sacral king became king—and became, in Bellah’s (2011) words, “the key link between humans and the cosmos” (p. 232). This ecosexual relationship—between God and Goddess, between human and divine—was exactly the original meaning of that key link. It was just this union that ensured the “life and peace” (p. 232) of the realm; the king incorporated the male fertility god and was married to the Goddess, the feminine aspect of the ecological-divine. It was this that made him king, or as Sjöö and Mor’s (1987) put it:

She was the throne—the throne symbolized her lap. ... To be “enthroned” is to be empowered, i.e., to receive the power of the Great Mother and her mandate to rule. This is why Egyptian paintings and statues depict the small, mortal king sitting on the throne-lap of the huge Goddess Isis. In this way the king was reborn, or made immortal, and thereby given the sacred power. (pp. 72–73)

The king as key link, then, may just as easily be seen in the context of marriage as that of sovereignty. That is, the king is representative of the mortal human community; his marriage to the Goddess is also marriage between human consciousness and the ecological wilderness. This is why the aforementioned hymn for Dumuzi’s coronation is not called “Dumuzi’s Ascent to Power” but rather the “Blessing of the Bridegroom,” for the

coronation of the ancient king was not a political event nor an occasion of dominion, but rather a celebration of a union that was understood to harmonize the natural world, revitalize its living abundance, and thus also ensure that the human community was fed. In fact, the entire hymn of the “Blessing of the Bridegroom” can be read in its totality as an address of prayer to the Goddess, who is also the bride, for it includes such passages as the following:

O milady, queen of heaven and earth,
queen of all heaven and earth,
may he live long in your embrace! (excerpted in Jacobsen, 1976, p. 42)

What comes into focus is that the primary role of the sacral king might be described as nothing quite so much as divine lover—thus his link to the fertility god is even clearer. The people sang “may he live long in your embrace” (in Jacobsen, 1976, p. 42) because, by sending a worthy consort to the Goddess, it was imagined that her satisfaction and fertility might be renewed, which was equivalent to the renewal of the abundance of the land.

This then is the titular “Blessing of the Bridegroom”—it is the blessing of a wedding, which is most importantly an event of the divine newlyweds blessing each other, which in turn blesses

all the land. The heart of the ceremony can be seen at as the union of the Goddess with the God, or the ecological land with the king, or the king with the queen, or the sacred waters with the fertile soil, because fundamentally each of these unions represents the same mythic complex—the same archetypal dance. Whichever of these images is adopted, the sacral king's coronation nowhere appears as a matter of rulership, but rather one of romance and abundance; hence, in the "Blessing of the Bridegroom," one finds not of violence or dominion, but a poetry of embrace and flourishing:

The king goes with lifted head to the holy loins
goes with lifted head to the loins of Inanna
the king going with lifted head,
going with lifted head to milady ...
puts his arms around the holy one (excerpted in Jacobsen,
1976, pp. 42-43)

The Bull, The King, the Lover Divine

I have emphasized the Sumerian context thus far as the earliest recorded example of this mythos. The motifs that I have reviewed here, however, do not cease with the decline of Sumer—they recur again and again in subsequent traditions, forming a cross-cultural lineage of dying god figures with associations of sacral kingship, ecological abundance, and ecosexual

partnership with the Goddess of the land. As Weston (1920/1997) summarized:

We now possess definite proof that, at a period of some 3000 years B.C., the idea of a Being upon whose life and reproductive energies was held to depend, yet who was himself subject to the vicissitudes of decline in powers and death, like an ordinary mortal, had already assumed a fixed, and practically final, form; further, that this form was specially crystallized in ritual observances ... and is, moreover, frequently accompanied by a remarkable correspondence of detail. (p. 39)

I summarize something of this correspondence of detail across the last two chapters. The mythically seminal power of the wellsprings and the river is taken as the same force that emerges into vegetation through “the power of the rising sap” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27). This same force, this same god, is furthermore understood to blossom into animal form—most famously through the image of the divine bull, that is, the “mighty beast in whose bodily form the river gods generally appeared” (Otto, 1965, p. 165). Thus, like the river, the bull was taken as an exemplar of the universal seminal power, the power to engender life where it met with the Goddess of the soil: whether along the riverbed or within the animal womb.

The magical vitality of this seminal masculinity as it partnered with the ecological-feminine was taken as “key link” (Bellah, 2011, p. 232) to the flourishing of the entire community of life. Such was the original meaning of kingship, not political but ceremonial, for just as the channel of the wellspring god could flow into rivers, into plants, into animals—so it must also find a way to regenerate the fluid vitality of the human community. This it did in the form of the life and death of the “king of nature” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 77), for ritually speaking, it was on those kings and their ecosexual union with the Goddess that “the fertility of men, of cattle, and of vegetation is believed to depend” (p. 237).

This seminal potency was perceived in the river, in the rising sap, and in the vital strength of the bull. The energy in each of these images is symbolic of the exuberant fierceness of divine enthusiasm as it manifests in mortal life—and this is no less the case for the human than for any other mortal life. Thus, not only the divine bull but also the divine shepherd—for again, Wild Bull Dumuzi meant both—went “with lifted head” (in Jacobsen, 1976, p. 42) to meet the Goddess who held his life and death in the ground of her being. In this moment of meeting, in the midst of cocreation with her eternal mythos, the bull and shepherd became the ecological king.

The ecological king as a living ritual performed a function as “key link between humans and the cosmos” (Bellah, 2011, p. 232), yet this cosmos must be understood as an ecological one, growing up out of the perduring Goddess of the ancient mountain and fertile soil. Hence, the original key link can be seen as marriage—the sacral king was an enactment not only of the dying god, but of the dying god’s function as the Goddess’s cocreative partner and mate. This marriage linked the world of humanity to the primordial ecology of life, promising a renewed abundance for all the land, just as the seasonal flux of the river renewed the soils of the valleys. Whether seasonally, generationally, or otherwise, the ebbing and flowing of life’s fertility cycles was remembered and renewed in such motifs, in Sumer and beyond.

Clearly, these forms of ecospiritual traditions would not remain predominant in human culture, but would gradually be displaced by new myths and and new priorities. Already by late Sumer, the old forms were giving way to the new city pantheons with their more political and warlike gods. The Mesopotamian rivers continued to flood and the seasons continued to wax and wane—but human ritual participation in these ecological cycles slowly began to diminish as the new city cultures grew in prominence and power (c.f. Shepard, 1982).

What happens when human communities divorce themselves from ritual participation in the ecological renewal of life? A new experiment was initiated as these cultural changes took root: an experiment that is still in progress today. Yet already by the late Sumerian period, certain effects of these transformations were becoming apparent. In the next chapter, I turn toward the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—the oldest work of literature on record—to more closely examine the cultural changes of late Sumer and the beginnings of their effects on the natural world.

CHAPTER 5: KINGS OF CEDAR MOUNTAIN

Who's not in love with the Butcher Girl?
How many men leave their mark on the world?
And out of them that do, how many deserve
to be wining and dining and holding her?
(Moore, 1999)

Gilgamesh and Enkidu

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is typically considered the oldest extant work of literature yet discovered. It is older than Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—often called the first modern novel—by nearly four thousand years, and it predates even Homer's Greek epics by nearly two thousand years. The earliest versions of *Gilgamesh* are typically dated to the end of the third millennium B.C.E., during the last centuries of Sumerian civilization. It is not possible to pinpoint a more precise date of

origin—for the *Epic* is really a pastiche pieced together by various sources whose many gaps have been “partly filled by various fragments found [throughout] Mesopotamia and Anatolia” (Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020, para. 2). Any contemporary rendition of the *Epic* is therefore an interpretative synthesis of multiple sources dependent on the work of various preceding translators. While the *Epic* comes out of the late Sumerian phase and bears the signs of that period—for example, the storm god Enlil has become king of the gods, having supplanted earlier ecological kings like Dumuzi—one still finds within it many themes and motifs of earlier times. Indeed, *Gilgamesh* should be defined less as a myth than a kind of Sumerian mythopoesis—a creatively interpreted encounter between the myths and traditions of new Sumer and the remnants of the old. A close reading reveals, for example, that while Enlil and his pantheon have come to dominate the religions of the city, much of the old animistic and pastoral

heritage is still very much alive, especially in the countryside and wilderness.²

This growing dichotomy between urban and nonurban life—between domesticated and wild spaces—is one of the most fascinating aspects of the rise of civilization. As Shepard (1982) described, civilized humanity created its own kind of ecological wasteland within the newly walled-off city spaces: an ecological wasteland, here, can be defined as a space of extremely limited biodiversity, as narrow a selection of life as one finds in a desert. As Shepard (1982) put it, the new urban human isolated this constructed wasteland from the surrounding natural ecology:

He came to live with his own fabrications as the environment. ... What remained outside his jurisdiction—the otherness of wildness (internal and external), death,

² I primarily rely on the highly readable and poetic N. K. Sandars (2nd millennium B.C.E./1998) translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* throughout this chapter. In certain instances, however, where the Sandars translation lacked salient nuance, I have instead draw on the M. G. Kovacs (2nd millennium B.C.E./1989) Stanford University Press translation. To keep these references from becoming overly cumbersome, I adopt a shorthand throughout the chapter: NKS for Sandars and MGK for Kovacs.

and the mysteries of growth and decay—would be repressed by his anxious fears, and this, too, would push him back toward those ready-made defenses that protect the infant from his own helplessness: unconscious fantasies and projections. These would disguise the wild beasts with his own ferocity. (p. 42)

The defenses that the new modern human built against wilderness were, particularly in early times, not only psychological but also literal. In fact, the entire *Epic of Gilgamesh* is thematically framed by this walling-off of wilderness, for the walls and gates of Uruk—the city-state ruled by the titular King Gilgamesh—form a thematic heart of the story. The walls of Uruk sharply divide the city from the wilderness, but they also form a psychological delineation between the old forms of culture and the new. From within these walls, Gilgamesh will set forth to wage his campaign against the wilderness—and against the old ways that still preside there. When one recognizes that urban existence was still a novel way of life at this time, an experimental island in a vast world of wilderness, then the clash between city and wilds takes on a more dramatic kind of immediacy, for its outcome was still uncertain.

This clash is introduced from the *Epic's* outset through the contrasting figures of the two main protagonists: Enkidu and Gilgamesh. While the two will eventually join forces, they are initially introduced as powerfully opposed—even destined—foes. This is explainable by the fact that both can be considered as avatars or representatives of very different and contrasting gods. One may note, for example, that the name *Enkidu* can be translated from the Sumerian as one whom “Enki has created” (c.f. Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016).

Enkidu is a wild-man, and a representative of the ancient fertility tradition—it is surely no coincidence that his name places him as descended from one of the earliest and most original of the Sumerian fertility gods. Nor is it a coincidence—in the light of the ancient mythos of the Mountain Goddess, as described in the previous chapter—that Enkidu is raised not by any human but by the mountain itself, sustained by its plant life and kept company only by the animals with whom he shares that wilderness. He is described as vegetarian, even grazing on the grass like the deer—and like the animal-shapeshifting mythos from which he arises, he too is possessed of the speed, strength, coordination, and acute senses of the wild beasts of his mountain home.

Far from that wilderness, in the heart of the walled city of Uruk, Gilgamesh also appears to be a kind of divinely inspired avatar. As the *Epic* records: “When the gods created Gilgamesh they gave him a perfect body. ... Two thirds they made him god and one third man” (NKS, p. 2). It is as if Gilgamesh has been ordained to be king from the moment of his birth—yet, his mode of kingship is very different than the traditional ecological kingship described in the previous chapter. For Gilgamesh is no avatar of ecological wilderness, but rather the apex man of the city, its military chief and unequivocal tyrant. His patron is not a fertility god, but is instead Shamash, the god of the sun and legal judgement. He also enjoys the support of Enlil, the storm god and divine warrior-king of the city pantheon. He exemplifies, in other words, the major changes that have occurred within the mythos of Sumer, especially in terms of kingship and governance—for in the new model, kingship is no longer based on ecological regeneration but rather on political governance and military power.

Such changes seem to be intimately tied up in changing relationship with the mythos of the feminine. This appears at multiple levels in the *Epic*—in degradation of the Goddess, in degradation of the ecological wilderness which is said to belong to the Goddess, and finally in degradation of the condition of

living human women. In other words, the rise of this new mode of kingship appears to be quite synonymous with the historical rise of what has been termed patriarchy.

For while the traditional mythos of kingship could be said to involve the seminal potency and stewardship of the realm's magico-religious father, it would nevertheless be hard to describe it as patriarchal. After all, as substantiated in the previous chapter, the traditional king was in many respects defined by his role as lover and cocreative partner of the Goddess; his strength and virility was for Her to find pleasing, and for the sake of engendering the regeneration of life. In contrast, the new mode of kingship—as exemplified by Gilgamesh—was to be characterized quite explicitly by the domination of women.

One finds this change introduced in the first pages of the *Epic*, in which it is mentioned that King Gilgamesh has claimed the right of *prima noctis* over all of Uruk: that is, he has demanded sexual rights to any bride on the night of her wedding. No doubt, his subjects resent this: “The men of Uruk muttered in their houses ... ‘his arrogance has no bounds by day or night. ... His lust leaves no virgin to her lover, neither the warrior’s daughter nor the wife of the noble’” (NKS, p. 3). This is to say nothing of how the women must feel, but unfortunately,

nothing can be done, for whatever Gilgamesh's abuses, no one can directly oppose the divinely gifted warlord, who is "as strong as a savage bull, none can withstand his arms" (NKS, p. 3).

None, that is, in Uruk. For far beyond the city's walls, the *Epic* proceeds to instruct, in a forest wilderness on a distant mountain, the gods have placed a being capable of challenging the mighty warrior-king. That being, of course, is Enkidu, who is introduced as Gilgamesh's fated counterbalance, the one destined to challenge him. In other words, as it turns out, the only force still capable of standing against the upstart urban tyrant is none other than the ancient wild king of ecology—the traditional guardian of exactly the natural balance that Gilgamesh threatens. To restore and regenerate the ecological balance would, in this light, be wild-man Enkidu's natural and ancestral task.

With this in mind, it is notable that Gilgamesh first becomes aware of the existence of Enkidu due to the wild-man's habit of freeing any animal caught in a hunter's traps. When Enkidu sees such imprisoned beings, it is natural instinct to set them free—such freedom is intrinsic to his nature. These interventions, however, alarm the hunters and thus reach King Gilgamesh's ear.

Unfortunately, Gilgamesh is no simple strongman. In fact, he has already dreamed prophetic warnings of the doom that Enkidu might bring him. Indeed, he is armed not only with a trained warlord's strength, but also with cutting-edge education and a keen awareness of myth and prophecy. So equipped, and with the aid of various advisors including his seeress mother, he forms a plot to overcome the beastly strength of Enkidu—not directly, but rather through a very cunning kind of sabotage: an attack on the mythic root of the wild-man's power. Gilgamesh sets out to disrupt Enkidu's connection to the land—to civilize him, in other words, and thereby destroy his otherwise indomitable wild strength.

The key to this mission will be sexual seduction by a female operative. It may be tempting to see such themes of seduction simply as an early patriarchal demonization of women's sexuality: the first Lilith, one might say. However, when one considers Enkidu in the light of the fertility gods and ecological kings of earlier times, then this theme of seduction takes on a much richer layer of mythic meaning. For Enkidu has appeared, in many respects, as a faithful example of the ancient ecological avatar—but a crucial component is missing.

In Enkidu's world, one finds wilderness, one finds the mountain, one finds an ecology full of plants and animals—but

one can find no mention of a goddess, a mother, a lover, or a wife. Enkidu has been reared by the mountain alone, his only family being the wilderness and the animals, and he has never known human society nor any woman's touch. In contrast to Dumuzi, the famous lover of the Goddess, there is a conspicuously empty space alongside Enkidu—in this context, it is striking that it is not force of arms that leads to Enkidu's defeat, for the wild-man is, after all, "the strongest in the world, he is like an immortal from heaven" (NKS, p. 4). His vulnerability lies, rather, in his isolation—an isolation that is an opening for Gilgamesh to send a seductress.

This strange isolation would be, one may imagine, symptomatic of the changing urban religions and the beginnings of a collective displacement regarding the old myths and rituals of ecological union. This is not to say that ancient myths and rituals have vanished—for they will in fact persist for many thousands of years. But Dumuzi-like gods or Green Man figures will rarely, post-Gilgamesh, be recognized in the light of paramount masculinity and true kingship as they once were. Henceforth, paramount masculinity will instead typically be claimed by the warrior gods and military chiefs—not by the fertile and fluid lovers of the Goddess.

Something, then, has already gone out of balance before the events of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have even begun. Indeed, if Enkidu's isolation is symptomatic of this imbalance, then so too one could venture, by the same token, that the very existence of the seductress is symptomatic of the same. How many generations of men and women, raised within the power structures of the city amidst its new patriarchal mythos, would be required to create a woman—perhaps even a priestess—ready to use her sex on behalf of the tyrant, and against the wild-man?

This estrangement of the lovers, and this betrayal of love, is especially tragic given that loving union is at the very heart of the Dumuzi mythos—hence, seduction as sabotage is the deepest betrayal possible of the fertility god's fundamentally generous sexual nature. In the absence of traditional union with the god, the trained seductress becomes possible. In the absence of traditional union with the Goddess, such seduction can be effectively leveraged—deliberately, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, by the tyrant himself—to tame the otherwise untamable nature of the wild-man. As the cunning plotters put it: "let her woman's power overpower this man" (NKS, p. 4).

It is certainly not romantic or sexual union itself that weakens the god—for as the ancient tales of Dumuzi illustrate,

such figures had long been participating in the divine rites of union, always before uplifted and empowered by energies so close to their own primal natures. Indeed, one imagines that this is exactly why the sabotage is so effective, for in seducing Enkidu into union that is not actually union—sex that is not primal or renewing, but is deliberately intended as sabotage—it would be as if his own ancient mythos and his own nature had been turned against him. Thus, postcoitus, though he remains a powerful warrior and embodied being, it is as he has been robbed of half of what makes him whole:

When the gazelle saw him, they bolted away; when the wild creatures saw him they fled. Enkidu would have followed, but his body was bound as though with a cord, his knees gave way when he started to run, his swiftness was gone. And now the wild creatures had all fled away; Enkidu was grown weak, for ... the thoughts of a man were in his heart. So he returned and sat down at the woman's feet, and listened intently to what she said.

(NKS, p. 4)

This is Gilgamesh's first victory over Enkidu—and it is also a victory of the new patriarchal paradigm over the more ancient ways. Cunning has overcome the old mythos of fertile union; both love and wildness have lost the battle. So the cycle of

domestication is allowed to continue, and in the figures of the tyrant and the seductress it seems to take on the appearance of a gendered cycle, in which patriarchal men tame wild women into patriarchal women who tame wild men, and so forth. It is a compelling illustration.

Nevertheless, Enkidu's domestication is incomplete; to be fully of use to the new civilization, he must be subjugated not only to the seductress but ultimately to the tyrant himself. Thus begins the second phase of Gilgamesh's plan, and Enkidu is invited to come to the city of Uruk. During the journey, other stratagems reinforce the initial taming. At the seductress' encouragement, Enkidu cuts off his hair—the earliest recorded parallel to Sampson and Delilah—and also begins to wear clothes. Thus bedecked as a modern Sumerian man, Enkidu is led into the outskirts of human society where the shepherds dwell. Those country folk introduce him to bread and beer—the products of the grain economy. Each of these shifts reinforces Enkidu's growing alienation from the wilderness that was the source of his primal strength.

Such a leeching of power must be exactly what Gilgamesh has in mind, and the preparations prove prescient, for when Enkidu finally enters Uruk and learns of the tyrant's much-resented claims of *prima noctis* against all the city's brides, the

wild-man—who surely still has some instinctive connection to the ancient mythos of regenerative love, and who in any case comes from a lifelong habit of freeing trapped animals—immediately takes issue and challenges the king. Thus, with the question of integrous kingship and masculine paramouncy in the foreground, the two finally begin their long-fated encounter. Enkidu has been much reduced from his original self—but even in a weakened form, he puts up the most vigorous opposition that Gilgamesh has ever seen, such their clash is described—like similar contests would have been described in the days of Wild Bull Dumuzi—as a battle between two great bulls: “and so they grappled, holding each other like bulls. They broke the doorposts and the walls shook, they snorted like bulls locked together” (NKS, p. 5).

It seems that the battle would have gone differently if the wild-man was still in his full strength. But Enkidu has been drinking beer and eating bread, has shaved his mane and put on clothes, has mated with his enemy’s agent and left his forest for the streets of the city. The wild-man is no longer quite wild, and the battle that occurs is on Gilgamesh’s terms. After a great effort, the warlord of Uruk is finally able to throw his rival to the ground and force his submission.

In this moment of his triumph, the king delivers the psychological *coup de grâce*. Rather than slay the wild-man, Gilgamesh praises him as the greatest of warriors and a true brother. At the same time, Gilgamesh's seeress mother, who has helped to orchestrate all of the king's plots from the beginning, rushes forward to embrace the wild-man as an adopted son. In a final seduction, Gilgamesh announces to all of Uruk that henceforth Enkidu will be a prince of the city, a man second only to King Gilgamesh himself.

Thus the wild-man, who in a strange historical moment of alienation from the Goddess has only known isolation all his life, is finally fully tamed not by sexual seduction and nor by violent defeat, but by the temptation of society itself. It is *belonging* that brings the indomitable and free Enkidu to heel—to Gilgamesh's heel—for he has been offered what the wilderness itself could never give him: intimacy, position, brotherhood, a place in the human family.

The Monster in the Woods

The seduction of Enkidu and his transformation from Gilgamesh's greatest foe into his greatest servant amplifies the latter's power considerably. With his destined rival removed—indeed, co-opted—the warlord is able to turn his gaze to even higher peaks. In fact, those peaks are literal, for his next plan is

to travel across the countryside and into the mountains where, with the help of his solar god patron and Enkidu's strong arm at his side, he intends to vanquish the forces of Inanna that still preside there.

With Enkidu no longer blocking the path, the greatest obstacle remaining takes the form of a famous forest guardian named Humbaba: Inanna's protector and the protector of the mountain. To slay Humbaba, Gilgamesh thinks, will be a great feat. He will not only make a name for himself as a legendary warrior; he will also open up the resources of the vast territory of the mountain wilderness. It is especially the lumber of the ancient trees, there, on which he has set his eye, for he plans to use them in the further expansion of his city's walls and gates. With this intent, the warlord goes forth, boasting to the citizens as he sets out:

I will conquer him [Humbaba] in his cedar wood and show the strength of the sons of Uruk, all the world shall know of it. I am committed to this enterprise: to climb the mountain, to cut down the cedar, and leave behind me an enduring name. (NKS, p. 7)

Some Euhemerist readings have lent themselves to the interpretation that Humbaba must have been a king of some neighboring state against which a historical king Gilgamesh led

Uruk into war. As Jacobsen (1976) put it: “The historical Gilgamesh must have headed the army of Uruk; and here again ... his name suggests that he was a military leader of extraordinary stature” (p. 209). Such may or may not have historically been the case, but there is nothing in the *Epic* itself to suggest such a literal reading. Rather, Gilgamesh is described as venturing forth with no army but with only Enkidu at his side, and Humbaba in turn leads no army but rather appears as a lone figure in the wilderness, much as did Enkidu at the beginning of the tale.

This turns out to be only the first of many parallels between Humbaba and Enkidu—like Enkidu, Humbaba is a wild-man and at least semi-divine being, firmly rooted in his local forest ecology, and known not only as a legendary warrior but also for his possession of various uncanny shamanic abilities. As the elders of Uruk warn Gilgamesh on his departure:

We have heard that Humbaba is not like men who die, his weapons are such that none can stand against them; the forest stretches for ten thousand leagues in every direction; who would willingly go down to explore its depths? As for Humbaba, when he roars it is like the torrent of the storm, his breath is like fire and his jaws are death itself. Why do you crave to do this thing, Gilgamesh?

It is no equal struggle when one fights with Humbaba,
that battering-ram. (NKS, p. 7)

From the viewpoint of the citizens of Uruk, then, Humbaba seems more like a wilderness monster or demigod than like the king of a neighboring state. While Humbaba may indeed be a king, such descriptions in the *Epic* seem to suggest a king in the old style, a “king of nature” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 77). He seems to command no servants and dwells in no palace, but rather lives in the mountain’s forests and caves and is master only of himself and his own natural powers. All such characteristics, as well as his intimate relations with Inanna herself, seem to suggest an ecological king—one who, unlike Enkidu, has not been severed from the old mythos, and thus continues in the traditional role as steward of the forest and consort to the Goddess.

With this in mind, it is notable that the greatest of Humbaba’s powers are not inherently violent in nature. Rather, Humbaba’s most fearsome magic is a kind of shamanic shapeshifting vitality that makes him nearly impossible to kill or to capture. Gilgamesh, with all his military training and warrior’s skills, has already proven himself against Enkidu—but Humbaba has not been half-domesticated or seduced, nor is he

susceptible to the same, for he remains in initiated partnership with the ancient Goddess of the wilderness.

Fundamentally, it is this partnership and immersion in the ancient mythos that Gilgamesh must fear. For even if the trained warlord is a mightier fighter, a better killer, Humbaba is the wielder of a mythos that allows him the freedom to slip away, always, into a new shape. Like the fertility god himself, like the river itself, indeed like ecology itself, Humbaba's gift is the dissolution and generation of endlessly new forms. Such varied forms are Humbaba's "seven splendours" (NKS, p. 9)—and they are the cause of Gilgamesh's greatest concern. As the warlord exclaims to Enkidu when they finally face the forest guardian: "Humbaba's face keeps changing!" (MGK, tab. 5)

Of course, such vitality and fluidity have already emerged in previous chapters as typical attributes of the Green Man, aspects of the fluid waters of life. One could say that such dynamism is a primordial characteristic of the god and therefore his avatars. Such shapeshifting associations both predate the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and are found long after. I already noted, in the previous chapter, that the Greek Dionysius was similarly remarked for his sheer variety of forms—and even more specifically, one finds that Dionysius was known for his ability to change freely between such shapes. That is, shapeshifting

powers characterized the much later Dionysius just as they did Humbaba. In Otto's (1965) words: "Myths tell us that Dionysus had the ability to change his form, and this, too, makes him like the forms to be found in moving waters" (p. 162). Otto also noted that "the Indian Deriades complains of the impossibility of conquering him—Dionysus—because ... the many-formed one was now a lion, a bull, a boar, a bear, a panther, a snake, and now a tree, fire, water" (p. 110).

The similarity to Humbaba is startling—and Gilgamesh, in the *Epic*, faces this same "impossibility of conquering him" (Otto, 1965, p. 110). While Humbaba's "seven splendours" (NKS, p. 9) are never specifically listed in any surviving text fragment, one imagines that perhaps they were forms very much like "a lion, a bull, a boar, a bear, a panther, a snake, and now a tree, fire, water" (Otto, 1965, p. 110). Such forms, after all, have been cross-culturally characteristic of the dying god—whose "dying" is also the capacity for changing shapes, for being reborn, and thereby a kind of immortality. Thus, one finds paradoxically that the god who is overcome by death again and again is the same god who cannot be overcome—thus presenting the "impossibility of conquering him" (p. 110).

Dumuzi—whose mythic roots predate Humbaba's by almost as great a distance in time as Dionysius's follow—was

also famed as a shapeshifter. The ancient god's connection to rivers, wellsprings, and the fluidity of waters has already been well-established, as has his association with various animal forms, but like Dionysius, Dumuzi's shapeshifting capacity is given as more explicit than this. It is a power that especially appears when the god is under threat, which is also true for Humbaba and Dionysius. In the myth called "Dumuzi's Dream," the god transforms into a gazelle and then various other animals in order to escape a pursuing mob. Unable to lose his hunters, he finally plunges into a river and drowns, subsequently to be reborn ceremonially in the usual seasonal cycle (Frazer, 1890/1994). Later tales of Dionysius, including various tellings of his attempted escapes from pursuing titans, would come to echo many of these same motifs (c.f. Otto, 1965).

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it is Humbaba who is possessed of this power and reputation. Gilgamesh seems to be aware that as long as Humbaba can shape-shift, he cannot truly be vanquished. This is why the warlord must keep in mind that Humbaba is "not like men who die" (NKS, p. 7), and it would also seem to be the source of the warlord's stricken cry: "Humbaba's face keeps changing!" (MGK, tab. 5). This reading is further reinforced by the warning that Gilgamesh gives to Enkidu when the two have managed to chase down their quarry:

Make haste, close in, if the watchman is there do not let him escape to the woods where he will vanish. He has put on the first of his seven splendours but not yet the other six, let us trap him before he is armed. (NKS, p. 9)

In other words, Humbaba has only just begun to open into his range of shapeshifting fluidity—and Gilgamesh seeks to stop him there. To achieve this, the warlord must call on a power that can match that of the dying god—that of his own divine patron: the solar god Shamash. Shamash, who is also notably the patron of judges and judgment, is somehow capable of countering the shapeshifter and pinning his shape. One notes a typical association of solar deities with pinning weapons like arrows and spears. Such an association may be partly accounted for by the linearity of the sun's rays, but there is also a deeper theme: that is, the sun, with its apparent unchangeability, can be contrasted against the endless shifting of the moon.

Contemporary folklore has cemented such lunar associations of shapeshifters thanks to the symbolism of werewolves—but this linkage between moon and shapeshifting is no doubt of ancient origins, perhaps beginning with observations of phenomena like oceanic tides and lunar phases. Humbaba's powers, like Humbaba himself, are thus intimately associated with the energies of the Goddess and the moon—and

so amidst the rising forces of patriarchy, it is fitting that he is finally defeated by the powers of the sun. Gilgamesh, as the mortal agent of that sun, could be said to summon the solar power of fixation. It may be the blade of an axe that physically slays Humbaba—but it is the sun’s magic that makes this possible by immobilizing the shapeshifter, countering his divine fluidity, freezing the magic of the waters of life:

Gilgamesh called to Shamash and his tears were flowing,
“O glorious Shamash, I have followed the road you
commanded but now if you send no succour how shall I
escape?” Glorious Shamash heard his prayer and he
summoned the great wind, the north wind, the whirlwind,
the storm and the icy wind, the tempest and the scorching
wind; they came like dragons, like a scorching fire, like a
serpent that freezes the heart, a destroying flood and the
lightning’s fork. The eight winds rose up against
Humbaba, they beat against his eyes; *he was gripped,
unable to go forward or back* [emphasis added]. (NKS, p.
9)

As a semidivine avatar associated with powers of vitality,
as the guardian and probably mate of the goddess Inanna within
her sacred cedar groves, and as a shape-changer—just like
Dumuzi before him and Dionysius to come—Humbaba bears all

the signs of the traditional fertility god mythos. There is even some additional evidence for this interpretation: Humbaba was also a “battering-ram” (NKS, p. 7), as described by the elders of Uruk. A battering ram is a piece of siege equipment, and in this sense, the antithesis of city walls—but is also an evocation of the animal, the ram, which is another major form of Dumuzi the Shepherd, and with only slightly more metaphor, the bull that rams. As the previous chapter describes, specific symbols like the ram and bull, the shepherd and cowherd, eventually became more or less interchangeable within the greater Dumuzi mythos. Building on this further, Humbaba also appears in the prophetic dreams that come to Gilgamesh just before they fight specifically as a “wild bull” (NKS, p. 8). Gilgamesh reports to Enkidu upon waking from these dreams:

Get up, look at the mountain precipice. The sleep that the gods sent me is broken. Ah, my friend, what a dream I have had! Terror and confusion; I seized hold of a wild bull in the wilderness. It bellowed and beat up the dust till the whole sky was dark. (NKS, p. 8)

Such a “wild bull in the wilderness” (NKS, p. 8) may seem horrifying to Gilgamesh, just as the fire-breathing and wild “battering ram” (NKS, p. 7) seems to terrify the citizens of Uruk—but when one looks beyond such reactions, there is really

nothing inhuman or monstrous about any of Humbaba's behavior in the *Epic*. Indeed, if anyone is behaving monstrously, it is clearly Gilgamesh, who has invaded the Goddess's mountain with homicidal and ecocidal intent. Humbaba, on the other hand, would actually prefer to avoid the fight altogether—in fact, Gilgamesh has to provoke him into combat by beginning to destroy the sacred cedars which belong to Inanna and which Humbaba is sworn to protect:

Gilgamesh seized the axe in his hand: he felled the cedar.

When Humbaba heard the noise far off he was enraged; he cried out, "Who is this that has violated my woods and cut down my cedar?" But glorious Shamash called to them out of heaven, "Go forward, do not be afraid." (NKS, p. 9)

Humbaba's reaction to the attack on the trees is immediate, almost as if the wood were of his own flesh. This impression is reinforced by an observation that Humbaba is eventually cut down with the same axe that is used on the trees. In his final moments, the so-called monstrous Humbaba pleads for Gilgamesh to change his mind, to spare both him and the forest. But Gilgamesh's response is simply to draw his weapons:

He took the axe in his hand, he drew the sword from his belt, and he struck Humbaba with a thrust of the sword to the neck, and Enkidu his comrade struck the second blow.

At the third blow Humbaba fell. Then there followed confusion for this was the guardian of the forest whom they had felled to the ground. For as far as two leagues the cedars shivered when Enkidu felled the watcher of the forest. ... Now the mountains were moved and all the hills, for the guardian of the forest was killed ... and while Gilgamesh felled the first of the trees of the forest Enkidu cleared their roots as far as the banks of Euphrates. They set Humbaba before the gods, before Enlil; they kissed the ground and dropped the shroud and set the head before him. (NKS, p. 10)

Thus Gilgamesh completes his quest, closing the second major chapter of the *Epic*. It is startling to me that so many modern interpretations of these characters read Gilgamesh, without irony, as heroic. These were not, after all, some foreign and unfamiliar deities against which Gilgamesh waged a holy war—Inanna had long been the most beloved of Sumerian goddesses, and Humbaba was quite clearly an example of her mortal consort, that is, an avatar of Dumuzi. That such an ecological king could be seen as a monster and hunted down in cold blood, that Inanna's sacred groves could be flatly desecrated and logged for lumber, that all of this could be committed not by some foreign villain but by a great chieftain

and king of Sumer—these are quite shocking turns within the ancient Sumerian tradition. How many generations did it take, behind the walls of Uruk, before the new culture of the urban dwellers could begin to imagine their once-celebrated patrons of fertility and renewal as wild and supernatural monsters?

Humbaba, guardian of the natural ecology, had tragically found himself in the path of the urban advance—and like a stubborn mountain grizzly who refuses to make way, he was ingloriously put down with an axe. The city dwellers' clash with the ancient cedar mountain was not over, however, for while Humbaba had been slain, the Goddess yet lived. King Gilgamesh's confrontation with the old ways was not yet finished, for Inanna would soon appear before him—not with vengeance, but with an offer of marriage.

Regarding Love, Power, and the Corruption of Marriage

On first impression, Inanna's marriage proposal to the very tyrant who desecrated her sacred home and slew her consort-guardian may seem unsavory, especially coming from a goddess known for her sexual sovereignty. It takes a deeper look to see through impressions of mercenary betrayal or tragic submission, to instead ask the following question: what does such an offer of marriage mean in light of Inanna's own ancient mythos?

To begin, it is necessary to consider these themes of marriage and kingship in the context of contemporary Goddess reconstructions and feminist concerns. I present in the previous chapter considerable evidence that from its most ancient recorded examples, the mythos of kingship emerged directly out of marriage with the Goddess—in Sjöö and Mor's (1987) summary terms: "*she was the throne*—the throne symbolized her lap" (p. 72). On the one hand, such a mythos may center and empower the Goddess and her representatives—it is cocreative partnership with Her, and nothing else, that fundamentally determines the ecological king. On the other hand, the entire affair may be suspected of tokenization—it runs the risk of reducing Goddess mythos and the favor of the feminine into a symbol of office for the male chieftancy, little different than a king's rod or crown.

Such tokenization does seem to be what happens, ultimately, as history unfolds. Frazer (1890/1994) noted several examples in which

a man may clearly acquire the kingdom just as well by marrying the widow as the daughter of his predecessor.

This is what Aegisthus did at Mycanae, and what Hamlet's uncle Feng and Hamlet's successor Wiglet did in

Denmark; all three slew their predecessors, married their widows, and then sat peacefully on the throne. (p. 127)

The queen, in such examples, has become an accessory of office and a prop of authority—her choice in the matter has been amputated by the violent power of patriarchal men. If one believes in the Goddess feminist theories of Neolithic matriarchies, then one may tend to perceive even the earliest examples of ecological kingship—as in the Inanna-Dumuzi mythos of early Sumer—as the beginning of this tokenization. That is to say, rule-as-partnership may already appear to be a fall from a vision of women’s autonomous and total rule. On the other hand, if this vision of autonomous and total rule is a fantasy to begin with—that is to say, an inversion of the patriarchal fantasy of the same—then rule-as-partnership would not represent a fall but rather an originally cooperative state of affairs. Thus, how one interprets the mythos of cocreative partnership across gender may be influenced by one’s vision of the original state; any belief in an original and “natural” superiority or rule of one gender over another would inherently itself to resentment regarding the idea of interdependence and necessary cooperation.

With this in mind, it makes sense to consider the theory of Neolithic Goddess matriarchies a little more closely. The most

comprehensive review of such reconstructionism that I have found is given by spiritual feminist and scholar Melissa Raphael (2000), who discusses both the historicity—or lack thereof—and the political dimensions of Neolithic matriarchy theories from their roots and into their modern manifestations. As Raphael (2000) wrote, the foundations of such matriarchy theories emerged from

works by nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropologists, folklorists and cultural historians, which used mythological texts and observation of contemporary “primitive” practices, to argue (without feminist motives) that goddesses were originally pre-eminent over gods. In particular, mid-nineteenth-century social scientists and scholars of religion, seeking for the origins of religion and of human social institutions, were deeply influenced by J.J. Bachofen (1815-87) who argued that the first human societies were universally matriarchal and goddess-worshipping before they were conquered and replaced by patriarchy. Although this view did not go uncontested it was widely supported by diverse and influential theorists such as Marx, Engels, Freud and Sir James Frazer, and was given a Jungian twist by Erich Neumann in 1955. (p. 89)

Such early anthropology served as the scholarly foundation for the subsequent work of Goddess reconstructionists including “Marija Gimbutas, Pat Monaghan, Barbara Walker, Merlin Stone, Starhawk and others” (Raphael, 2000, p. 89). Notably, that preceding anthropological work of was not only not particularly feminist, but was often itself quite explicitly patriarchal. As Sjöö and Mor (1987) put it, Bachofen himself was “quite eloquent in his justifications of patriarchal culture” (p. 280). To summarize, the matriarchal theories of the early anthropologists were based in a general dismissal of all “primitivism”, such that the rise of patriarchal civilization was seen as an evolutionary climb out of the earlier matriarchal stage. In this sense, Goddess reconstructionism started as an inversion of the original matriarchal theory, reversing the positive-negative values of the two hypothesized stages. While accepting the historical vision of the early anthropologists, the Goddess reconstructionists redefined the hypothesized matriarchal stage as the desirable one, such that the development of patriarchal civilization would be understood as a fall from the original maternal paradise.

The issue here is that the hypothesis itself was never based in rigorous history or scholarly consensus. Thus, as compelling as the idea might be for many people, the vision of

the widespread Neolithic matriarchy “has been regarded by the contemporary academic establishment as signaling the revival of an outdated, discredited theory that was marginal even at the time” (Raphael, 2000, p. 89). Thus, the fact that such visions of Neolithic matriarchy remain popular within a certain segment of cultural studies even today may have more to do with the image’s ideological power than with its historicity. As Raphael (2000) put it:

Of the contemporary feminist community, it is really only spiritual feminists who are persuaded by the historicity of a universal, matrifocal, pre-patriarchal culture. Feminist academics outside the Goddess movement generally argue that spiritual feminist historiography has simply jettisoned the normal academic endeavor of at least trying to assess and balance evidence in a rigorous, objective and disinterested manner. It is argued that spiritual feminist historiography is more theological and political than it is strictly historical in character; that, in less charitable words, much of it is simply wishful thinking. (p. 94)

This may seem like very strong language—thus it is notable that this critique is coming out of feminist quarters, and that it is based not in ideology but in a commitment to scholarly rigor. Unfortunately, such critiques becomes fairly impossible to

avoid if one reads Goddess feminist reconstructionism with a commitment to such rigor, for while there is no doubt a great deal of value to be found in the writings of the Goddess feminists—particularly in their mythic and symbolic analyses, which I reference appreciatively throughout this very work—it nevertheless becomes apparent that such discourses are indeed characterized by the aforementioned abandonment of “at least trying to assess and balance evidence in a rigorous, objective and disinterested manner” (p. 94).

To take one small example, one finds in Gottner-Abendroth’s (1980) history the declaration: “I accept from the outset the existence of matriarchies as fact, for I am critical of the narrow historical perspective that has ousted the memory of this social system from consciousness” (p. 3). This makes it clear that regardless of historical consensus or disputation, Neolithic matriarchy is to be assumed as a basic postulate. One finds similar kinds of unsupported and unverifiable historical claims elsewhere. For example, as Sjöö and Mor (1987) declared: “Women were everywhere the original mantics—the shamans, the ecstatic oracular prophets, the visionary poets. ... This is woman’s original and organic province” (p. 173).

It seems that one is meant to take from this that all mysticism and spirituality found among men was copied from

women—an extraordinary claim to make without any evidence. The problematics of gender essentialism notwithstanding, one can see why the lack of historical grounding within such reconstructions has ultimately caused more rigorous feminist scholars to distance themselves from the Neolithic matriarchy theories, and thus to broadly

tend to agree with “mainstream” anthropologists and historians of religion who argue that, while goddess worship evidently played a prominent role in the religious life of the Upper Paleolithic era, [one] cannot deduce an early matriarchy of the sort described by Goddess feminists. (Raphael, 2000, p. 95)

With this in mind, it is not only the political ideology of patriarchy but also that of matriarchy that must be considered with a degree of skepticism if one is to undertake a more genuine retrieval of ancient meanings—for the entire notion of the domination of any one group, individual, or perspective is in some sense contrary to the ethos of ecology itself. Ecology is a web of relations, and as such, interdependent cocreation makes far more sense as its mythic foundation. And indeed, as far as the historical record goes—as I have reviewed herein—the first recorded examples of the mythos of queenship and kingship took such forms of cocreative ecological partnerships.

If one accepts such partnership ethos as the original condition—that is to say, it is the oldest recorded pattern found in the historical record—then one may be more willing to perceive a statement like “*she was the throne*” (Sjöö & Mor, 1987, p. 72) in a cocreative rather than appropriative light. That is to say, one does not have to immediately suspect all dynamics of relationality and interdependence as intrinsically dominating and exploitative. In this case, later developments that turn the Goddess and her representatives into accessories of authority would be seen as a cooption of an originally mutualistic partnership—much as the various symbols of the ancient ecological kings and the fertility god were similarly coopted by the rising military tyrants to legitimize their coercive rule (c.f. Bellah, 2011).

To perceive such a corruption of the symbols—including the transformation of the Goddess’s original blessing into the widespread tokenization of queens as an accessory of office—is important, but should not be conflated with what the symbols meant to people in their original context. Those indigenous dynamics, as for example found between Inanna and Wild Bull Dumuzi in the mythos of early Sumer—seem to have represented a very sincere and passionate mutuality. It is probably worth recollecting that such mutuality is possible, that

trust has existed, and that cocreation infuses the earliest known myths.

Granting, then, a certain amount of credence to the sincerity of the ecological partnership as it appears in the oldest recorded examples—let us take a closer look at the question of marriage to the Goddess. To begin with, one might note that a traditional “king of nature” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 77) could retain their role only so long as they were able to perform their magico-sexual functions: such virility was key. When one understands that sacral kingship was not a political but a ceremonial role—he was, first and foremost, the Goddess’s lover, steward of the land’s fertility, quickener of the sacred soil—then this restriction makes some sense. For as Frazer (1890/1994) recounted through innumerable cases—and as the previous chapter’s discussion of “The Blessing of the Bridegroom” (in Jacobsen, 1976, pp. 41–43) exemplifies—the ability of such ecological kings to satisfy the Goddess and quicken the soil was taken as crucial for the abundance of the entire ecosystem, on which the people’s sustenance in turn depended. Thus, any decline that compromised the king’s vital functions—such as old age, sickness, or injury—could not generally be tolerated.

Many examples can be provided from myth and folklore. One may note the Irish Celtic legend of Nuada Airgeadlám: “Nuada of the Silver Hand.” The greatest of all the kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann, Nuada was universally beloved by his people. Even so, upon losing his hand in battle, they demanded that he retire, for the ancient custom held that no man of damaged body could fulfill the deeper magic of kingship. Nuada could not resume the role until years later, after his dismembered hand had been replaced by a magically functional golden prosthesis (Ó hÓgáin, 1991).

Another Celtic legend sheds further light on Nuada’s situation—that of the Fisher King, Percival, and the Grail. As Chrétien de Troyes (12th century C. E./1996) recounted, a young Percival comes across a mysterious land that is afflicted with famine and sickness. These afflictions turn out to be related to an unhealing wound on the body of the realm’s aged king—a wound, specifically, of the groin. That is, a vital injury to the ecological king has been reflected in the injured vitality of the whole realm.

It is Percival’s private journey of many years—one that, in literary terms, extends from de Troyes’s (12th century C.E./1996) famous composition into subsequent “continuations” by other authors (see Grigsby, 1991)—to seek understanding

into the nature of this wounded land and, finally, to resolve the unhealing injury. In doing so, Percival gains the much sought-after blessing of the Grail—that is, the favor of the Goddess—and in some versions of the legend proceeds to inherit the throne (Grigsby, 1991). One finds here, as in the most ancient examples, that the favor of the Goddess and the sacral kingship are effectively identical. The legend thus concludes with the kingship restored to vitality—whether the old king is now healed or Percival now crowned—and by same token, the land’s abundance is returned. One can see, then, how Weston’s (1920/1997) detailed studies of such legends would conclude the following:

After upwards of thirty years spent in careful study of the Grail legend and romances I am firmly and entirely convinced that the root origin of the whole bewildering complex is to be found in the Vegetation Ritual, treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life-Cult, *and in that alone*. Christian Legend, and traditional Folk-tale, have undoubtedly contributed to the perfected romantic *corpus*, but they are in truth subsidiary and secondary features. (p. 154)

In other words, the legend of Percival and the Grail—according to Weston (1920/1997)—is very much a remnant of

the ancient fertility tradition, and the figure of the Fisher King is an ailing example of ancient ecological kingship. In such an example, one sees why the wounded Nuada was required to give up the Tuatha throne. An injury to the vitality of the ecological king was considered magically dangerous to all.

Examples such as those of Nuada and Percival help to clear up a certain imbalance found in Frazer's (1890/1994) obsession with violent succession and human sacrifice. For as in these legends, one also finds cases of nonviolent succession to the ecological throne. Indeed, Percival heals the ailing king—and the Goddess loves him for it. Beloved Nuada, too, is eventually healed—and welcomed back into the kingship of the realm. One observation here is that strength demonstrated through combat is only one appearance of vitality in the world. Besides athletic prowess: healing, music, poetry, dance, learning, gardening, and all forms of artistry are also channels for vital energies and also, therefore, realms in which one may court the Blessing of the Grail or the Favor of the Goddess.

Such an understanding may help to reveal what it is, exactly, that the Goddess sees in the ever-dying God. For it cannot be provision, protection, or social rank that draws her—there are other figures much better suited to such than the “Wild Bull” or cowboy who may indeed be king but more or less

lacks a kingdom, at least among human realms. Yet, there may be no figure better equipped with the mad vitality—that beating heart of romance—that is capable of touching the fertile depths of being as profoundly as it touches the material body and the world. Bly (1990) described the Goddess’s particular affection for such wild potency in the following passage:

The Mysterious Hidden Woman, as I have called her elsewhere, loves privacy, overhanging trees, long skirts, the shadowy places underneath bridges, rooms with low lighting. One intense sexual storm in a hay barn means more to her than three years of tepid lovemaking; she wants passion and purpose in a man, and she carries a weighty desire in her, a passion somewhere between erotic feeling and religious intensity. (p. 140)

If the origins of such “romances” are in the “Vegetation Ritual ... Life-Cult” as Weston (1920/1997, p. 154) put it, then it seems clear that the continuation of life must be the central concern. As one encounters images of kingly combat or fearsome bulls within the fertility traditions, one ought to suspect they may be dealing in some way still with the topic of generative union. Fertility gods like Dumuzi and Dionysius may indeed appear as terrifying and mighty presences, but they are not trained warlords and they never really go to war. This is to

say, even in their most fearsome forms, such gods essentially remain passionate lovers in a wild dance of cocreative partnership with an equally passionate Goddess.

Dumuzi's avatars—such as Enkidu and Humbaba—might be physically and magically impressive, but their combative powers can only be a side effect of their deep vitality of life. They are in this way much like animals—thus, traditional combat between fertility avatars ought to be understood less as a kind of warfare than as an aspect of animal courtship. Even a title like “Wild Bull” speaks to such roots in animal courtship: for all his snorting and rutting power, the Wild Bull Dumuzi is a lover, not a fighter. When bulls lock horns, after all, the intent remains essentially procreative—and the rule is not to kill. No doubt the original cowboy can fight, but surely he'd rather enjoy a sunset or write a poem than go to war.

In this light, Frazer's (1890/1994) tendency toward examples of kingly succession by execution, mortal sacrifice, and lethal combat probably exposes certain biases. A potential successor to Frazer's (1890/1994) titular King of the Wood was to essentially hunt down the old king in his forest and murder him there, thus demonstrating his greater vitality in this most brutal of ways. In the context of animal courtship ritual, this is generally considered very poor form—but it is indeed essentially

what Gilgamesh does: he hunts down Humbaba in the forest of which the latter is the guardian and mate to Inanna, and murders him there.

The context is now laid for a fuller understanding of Inanna's marriage proposal. As reviewed in the previous chapter, real kingship in the traditional context was synonymous with marriage to the Goddess—this is the “Blessing of the Bridegroom” (in Jacobsen, 1976, pp. 41–43), and I would argue is also the same as the blessing Percival finally receives from the Grail. However good at violence a Wild Bull might be, however he might dominate his rivals, he was still not truly king unless recognized and chosen by the Goddess.

Inanna's natural assumption, emerging from such a tradition, would be that even the most aggressive of contenders—even a murderous bull like Gilgamesh—must be fundamentally engaged in the same ancient ritual of animal courtship. All chiefs—whether kind or cruel, peaceable or dominating, killers or gardeners—had always lived within the same numen of fertility, for to seek for the kingship of the ecological realm was to seek marriage with its Goddess, thus becoming the ecosexual father of a new generation. Ecological kingship could not traditionally be separated from what one might call the Quest for the Grail, which is another way of speaking of the Goddess's

love for a generative and kingly vitality: the virile power to cocreate the future.

In Inanna's eyes, then, Gilgamesh surely seems familiar. He may be an overbearing specimen, uncourtly, rampaging through her forest and murdering her friend. Yet, it is surely not the first time that the bulls have gone a bit too wild—and for all his flaws, Gilgamesh is no doubt strong and full of vitality, no doubt an apex bull of his age. Inanna is thus ready to pass the ecological kingship onto Gilgamesh, in accordance with traditional ways, through an offer of union. He will probably be a rough tyrant of an ecological king, but he will no doubt get the job done, as his predecessors always have before him.

Against all traditional expectations, however, Gilgamesh refuses this invitation—and it is here that the *Epic* truly deviates from the old ways. Gilgamesh styles himself a new sort of king—the king of the city. He is not a king because he has partnered with the Goddess, nor because he stewards an ecology and assures its fertile abundance. Nor is he interested in returning to the Goddess's fold, as his rejection of her makes explicit:

If I take you in marriage. ... How would it go with me?

Your lovers have found you like a brazier which smolders in the cold, a backdoor which keeps out neither squall of wind nor storm. ... Which of your lovers did you ever love

forever? What shepherd of yours has pleased you for all time? Listen to me while I tell the tale of your lovers. There was Tammuz [Dumuzi], the lover of your youth, for him you decreed wailing, year after year. ... You have loved the lion tremendous in strength: seven pits you dug for him, and seven. You have loved the stallion magnificent in battle, and for him you decreed whip and spur and a thong, to gallop seven leagues by force. (NKS, p. 11)

This speech reveals an interesting depth of insight regarding Gilgamesh's complaints against the fertility tradition. He demonstrates considerable familiarity with the mythos, and he has clearly thought about this before—has ruminated, it seems, on the fact that even the most beloved of the Goddess's ecological kings must in time die and give way, just as Humbaba has given way to him.

Thus, Gilgamesh makes explicit that he will not be the same as the old kinds of ecological kings. Indeed, he has made his life into a contrast against them: first in his fated confrontation with Enkidu, then in his battle with Humbaba, and even in his choice of gods, for Gilgamesh worships no fertility Goddess or God, but rather the warrior deities of sky, sun, battle, and storm. With this refusal of marriage to Inanna—a

refusal to take up the role of ecological kingship after slaying the throne's previous occupant—he takes this contrast to the next level. Unlike the ecological kings of the past, Gilgamesh will not surrender into union or enter into cocreative partnership with the Goddess, but would rather set his tyrannical will over her and over nature itself.

I introduce, in the first chapter of this dissertation, the notion that at the root of the modernity's alienation from nature there is an existential terror that seeks to control the world. Inevitably failing that control, inexorably faced with mortality itself, such a psychology is finally faced with a choice between surrender and ecocidal annihilation. All of this fits neatly with what Gilgamesh says in his refusal: he rejects a willing union with the Goddess, for she offers no salvation from the difficulties and terrors of life and death. Rather, she carries within her nature the very totality of life, which includes suffering and death. The love she offers is not a love that the warlord is willing to embrace.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* reveals this psychology of annihilation at its source, emanating from the first cities that walled themselves off from wilderness. The *Epic* reveals that near the heart of the psychology of alienation is the archetype of the Western hero, of which Gilgamesh has been termed the first

literary example. His primary acts of heroism—his taming of Enkidu, his murder of Humbaba, and his rejection of Inanna—all help to tell the story of a new kind of tyrant who has now usurped the traditional ecological kingship: the king is dead; long live the king.

If a king represents something like a civilization's foremost male mythos, its paramount masculine ideal, then the usurpation of kingship portrayed in the *Epic* is a window into a radical transformation within Sumerian civilization and within the development of Western civilization as a whole. Gone were the days when the cowboy-poet-lover Dumuzi was the unequivocal chief of the gods, generously renewing the natural world alongside Inanna. *Gilgamesh* heralded the arrival of a new age and a new paramount masculinity—one no longer sworn to a cycle of regenerative partnership with ecology and its Goddess, but organized rather around the new urban civilization's goals of conquest, exploitation, and control.

Chopping at the Root of Life

It was not the killing of Humbaba that broke from the old mythos, and no divine punishment suddenly manifested upon the murder of the forest guardian. While Inanna might lament a lost love, while Humbaba's death might cause the forest to shudder for "as far as two leagues" (NKS, p. 10), such

lamentations were themselves an established chapter within the traditional mythic cycle. Indeed, as Frazer (1890/1994) would attest, even the murder of the dying god's representative by a rival was well-known within the old traditions.

Gilgamesh, however, does not simply slay the dying god's representative. In his refusal of the Goddess, in his speech of rejection, he makes it clear that he means to set himself against the ancient mythos itself—to end not just Humbaba but the entire tradition of dying gods and ecological kings. He has not come to claim the kingship of the sacred mountain, but to destroy its mythic power, to humiliate its Goddess, and to harvest its trees for his own use.

It is this that is new. It is this that breaks from the old ways. It is at this moment that the Heavens finally take issue with the warlord. With the ecological balance of the world at stake, Inanna urges the other gods to intervene—and at her behest, an avenging spirit is set loose to destroy Gilgamesh once and for all. The vengeful god is only referred to as the Bull of Heaven—a somewhat ambiguous name, for as has been seen, the bull motif was a popular device in ancient Sumer, and more than a few gods were compared to bulls. Yet, the origins of that device have become clear—namely, the Divine Bull was a symbol rooted in the oldest recorded Sumerian traditions,

emerging out of the grasslands of the Sumerian cowboys with their patron Wild Bull Dumuzi (in Jacobsen, 1976, p. 44). If Inanna called for a champion and was answered by a Bull of Heaven, it certainly points in the same direction—for who would be more likely to avenge the Goddess than her own divine husband?

Gilgamesh has already offended the fertility god on multiple counts. He has sabotaged and coopted the avatar Enkidu. He has hunted and slain the avatar Humbaba. He has declared war on the mythos itself through his humiliating rejection of the Goddess. And finally, he has begun to log the forests of the sacred mountain. Such forests, I suggest in the previous chapter, can be likened to the body of the Green Man himself—an extension of the waters of life as they emerge through the birth-channel of the Goddess's soil to become "the power in the rising sap" (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27). One might consider not only Enkidu and Humbaba as incarnate avatars of the fertility god, but also the forest as another manifestation of his flesh. No wonder Humbaba reacts as if in personal pain when Gilgamesh's axe strikes into the cedars.

With the same axe, Gilgamesh has attacked the fertility god in both his manifestations as the ever-shifting forest and as its avatar, the forest's guardian, the shapeshifter Humbaba—

also called “wild bull in the wilderness” (NKS, p. 8). So the Bull of Heaven appears, now, not as a mortal avatar, but as the divine spirit himself: a god who has been given every reason to avenge himself and his Goddess against the tyrant. Thus, the divine bull charges.

The ensuing battle is not much worth mentioning. As Gilgamesh subdued Enkidu when they fought, “holding each other like bulls” (NKS, p. 5), as he destroyed Humbaba, that other “battering ram” (NKS, p. 7), so do Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay the Bull of Heaven. The entire sequence seems perfunctory, and in fact echoes the murder of Humbaba shortly before. Yet there is some difference between the two sequences—for Humbaba was a being of flesh, divinely inhabited but in the end quite killable. The Bull of Heaven, on the other hand is a god, and whether one sees the curse of a god in religious or in psychological terms, the fact remains that a nightmarish image cannot be killed by muscle or by axe. In spite of their apparent victory, then, the threat of the Bull of Heaven somehow continues to loom over Gilgamesh and Enkidu, for immediately following these events, Enkidu is visited by a disturbing dream:

When the daylight came Enkidu got up and cried to
Gilgamesh, “O my brother, such a dream I had last night.
Anu, Enlil, Ea and heavenly Shamash took counsel

together, and Anu said to Enlil, "Because they have killed the Bull of Heaven, and because they have killed Humbaba who guarded the Cedar Mountain, one of the two must die." (NKS, p. 11)

According to Enkidu's dream, the murders of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven are joined in the gods' eyes as a compound crime—thus reinforcing the parallelism I have described between the two. Though Gilgamesh has triumphed in each case, the curse of the gods is still coming for him. After all, even if Gilgamesh could kill every avatar of the ecological gods across the Earth, he cannot slay ecology itself. Moreover, the attempt to do so is inherently self-destructive—a fact made manifest in the nature of the curse. For the curse of the gods, the curse of the murder of the Heavenly Bull, turns out to be the loss of precisely what has been slain: that is, the curse is the failure of vitality, the sickness of wasting away.

Sickness, like a nightmare, cannot be slain by the violent power of any warlord. In fact, the failure of health can be seen as precisely symptomatic of the warlord's assault against the forces of ecological vitality. It would be tempting to say that such a curse is exactly what Gilgamesh deserves. The problem is, as so often happens in such cases, the effects of the curse

somehow land a little to the left; it is not Gilgamesh whom the curse finally afflicts.

Enkidu, once-avatar of the wilderness, coopted by the warlord's plots and his own isolation, has stood by his adopted brother through all their trials. He has loaned Gilgamesh his strength in every battle. With Enkidu standing by Gilgamesh, as faithful as a trained dog, the two have apparently become so indistinguishable that the gods can declare, when assigning their curse, simply that "one of the two must die" (NKS, p. 11).

Over the course of the following weeks, Enkidu's prodigious strength drains from his body and his suffering increases until he finds himself on his deathbed. As the end nears, the once-wild-man finds that what he grieves most is not so much the prospect of pain or death, but rather the loss of his strength. He finds himself wishing that he had been cut down in battle, for then at least he would not have experienced this wasting weakness. In his own words, "I feared to fall, but happy is the man who falls in the battle, for I must die in shame" (NKS, p. 13). Enkidu may not realize it, but this shame—this draining of life and strength—began long before this moment. It began when he inadvertently turned from his own wild root, the root of his wild strength.

The crux of Enkidu's sickness is that he has ignorantly betrayed his own essential nature. This self-alienation was foreshadowed from the earliest moments of his seduction, when the wild-man's animal friends first fled from him in the forest. It was foreshadowed when, as he began to chase after them, his feet stumbled for the very first time, as if a lifelong and natural embodiment was suddenly robbed from beneath him. As his legs gave out, it must have been as if the roots that had always connected him to the earth suddenly became strangers.

The self-betrayal becomes even more striking in subsequent events: for if Enkidu and Humbaba and the mountain forest and the Bull of Heaven are all manifestations of the ancient Sumerian fertility god as I have argued, then Enkidu's participation in the conquest and destruction of each of these amounts to self-destruction. With axe in hand, Enkidu has helped his sworn brother hack at the roots of his own vitality, his own mythos, his own ecological home. Thus, though Gilgamesh may seem more deserving of the curse of the gods, it is Enkidu who weakens—the once indomitable avatar confused as to why his strength has suddenly drained away—and finally dies.

Of the Wild and the Tame

Each of the deaths of the many faces of Dumuzi, as presented in the *Epic*, are a microcosm of civilization's conquest of wilderness. Enkidu, Humbaba, the Bull of Heaven, and the cedar mountain itself, have all fallen victim to Gilgamesh's war against nature. Whatever imbalances existed at the beginning of the tale—imbalances visible in places like the tyranny of Uruk and the alienated state of the wild Enkidu, who appears without mother or lover—have escalated to the point of mythic and ecological collapse. Dumuzi himself, in the end, has been vanquished. He will no longer be known as king. Though he has died many times, and though he will never die, he has in some new way been slain.

Unlike her ancient partner and cocreator, Inanna is not slain. She may be humiliated and wounded—indeed, perhaps propelled into the myth of *Inanna's Descent* (see Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983) which I would suggest seems to follow from these events—but regardless, her life goes on. Her survival is another way that the *Epic* recapitulates the ancient fertility mythos, for the Goddess of the Mountain had always lived while her partner died, celebrating and mourning his cyclic birth and death, his fluid ebbing and flowing across the soil of the world. Inanna had long honored her consort's passing in the traditional

way: “bitter laments when he dies as the dry heat of summer yellows the pastures and lambing, calving, and milking come to an end” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 26).

Such laments are found even in the *Epic* itself. They are, appropriately, sung at the occasion of the death of Enkidu—reinforcing his identification with the ancient fertility god. The hymn so provided for Enkidu’s death includes many of the traditional motifs of the Goddess laments, including images of the riverbank, the traditional site for the lamentation rites to occur. There is, however, a difference in the ritual event as it appears in the *Epic*—for this time, the hymn is sung not by Inanna or her priestesses, but by Gilgamesh himself. The warlord, who is in so many ways responsible for Enkidu’s death, now usurps the Goddess’s lament, singing:

The river along whose banks we used to walk,

Weeps for you. ...

Where once we drew water for the water-skins.

The mountain we climbed where we slew the Watchman,

Weeps for you ...

All the people of Eridu

Weep for you, Enkidu. (NKS, p. 14)

It is tempting to dismiss the entire relationship between Enkidu and Gilgamesh as an artifact of the latter’s machinations

—but as found in Gilgamesh’s laments, the bond between the two men comes across in some ways as genuine. While the training of a dog may be a manipulative kind of event, the affection that results is real enough. Similarly, while Gilgamesh may have engineered the entire alliance and brotherhood for his own personal gain, his respect for Enkidu’s vital strength was certainly never feigned.

One might take this a step further and say that perhaps Enkidu represents something primal but repressed in Gilgamesh—indeed, in all civilized men—something much like the presence that Bly (1990) termed “Iron John”: a very hairy man trapped inside a very deep well. The brotherhood between Enkidu and Gilgamesh would then take on an archetypal significance—an inescapable bond between two very different aspects within each of us. This gives a certain intrapsychic context to Nietzsche’s (1872/1993) observations regarding the complex attraction that the clean-cut sons of modernity feel for a hairier and more ancient image of manhood:

Nature, still unaffected by knowledge, the bolts of culture still unforced—this is what the Greeks saw in their satyr, and for that reason they did not conflate him with the apes. On the contrary—he was the archetype of man ... it was here that the true man revealed himself. ... Before

him, the man of culture shriveled up into a mendacious caricature. (pp. 40–41)

This raises the question: what is lost from mankind in the rise of the city? Shepard (1982) wrote a great deal regarding the paradox of urban power: that is, while urban civilization achieves unprecedented abilities as a collective, it simultaneously stunts the holistic development of its constituents, creating “identity cripples, deprived in various social and ecological dimensions, yet also cripples in the sense of potential capacity, the possibilities of personal realization in the archaic and magnificent environments of the deep past” (p. 121). This would seem to be part of what is found in Enkidu, himself a relic of such “archaic and magnificent environments” (p. 121). Born into the fullness of his natural power, raised within the untouched wilderness that he called home, Enkidu has avoided the urban “calamity for human ontogeny” (p. 127) to which the people of Uruk and other cities have begun to fall victim. Thus, he runs like a deer, stalks like a wildcat, fights like a bear, and lives off the natural abundance of the forest.

City people are generally incapable of such feats. Notably, the repression of natural power that one finds amongst city people is not incidental to civilization’s constitution—it is precisely its nature, for civilization as we know it depends on a

hierarchical organization that necessarily subjugates its own citizens. Humans fully actualized into their natural power make poor subjects of the state—poor slaves, poor serfs, and poor employees. As Shepard (1982) put it: “The psychology of self-actualization, group dynamics, and personal therapy, aimed at healing individuals ... though helpful to the individual, is basically antagonistic to the modern state, which needs fearful followers and slogan-shouting idealists” (pp. 127–128).

There is one partial exception to this rule of stunted potential. That exception is, namely, Gilgamesh: the paramount, the elite, the enforcer, the king, who stands atop the pyramid of society and has as his assigned task its policing and expansion. In order to fulfill this task effectively, he must be a head taller than the citizens who stoop below, whose labor enables his strength. In addition to whatever natural gifts may have helped him to take this position, he is furthermore provided with the best of training, education, and nourishment in order to maintain it—thus, Gilgamesh is undefeatable in Uruk.

One might see then, in the juxtaposition between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, a more general juxtaposition between two cases of human actualization: one that is the wild birthright of all humans born and raised within natural ecologies, and the other that is manufactured within the patriarchal city-state to be given

to the highest-ranking people—usually men—within the urban hierarchy. Notably, to judge by Nietzsche's (1872/1993) description of "the satyr ... the true man" (pp. 40–41) as well as by Gilgamesh's admiration of Enkidu, it seems that even such urban elites may find something to admire in the wild human, who is neither propped up nor crushed down by the state, but rather lives freely growing like a natural vine. One may further note that even the most successful tyrant is not as free, in many respects, as the natural human—for the tyrant still depends on the social hierarchy and its institutions, and must in truth live a life of exceedingly close attention to it. Is not all the training and politics just for this—to preserve one's rank at the top?

The wild human, on the other hand, gains strength simply through the realities of vital living in relationship with the natural world. Thus, Enkidu—like all ecological kings, all avatars of the Green Man—may be physically and spiritually powerful, but is certainly not a soldier and he is only incidentally a warrior. He is the Wild Bull, and while bulls may be territorial, they do not wage wars, and their power is that of a natural strength associated with activities like running, wrestling, and mating. Thus: "Enkidu is a wild and primitive being who ... stands forth as one of the oldest images of the

potent energy that is inherent to the Green Man” (Matthews, 2001, pp. 27-28).

Notably, this natural strength is quite enough to contend with the finely honed fighting and killing abilities of Uruk’s paramount warrior—and it is on just this basis that the bond between Enkidu and Gilgamesh is formed. Whatever machinations may be in the warlord’s mind, there can be no faking this meeting of vital powers. Each finds in the other a drive, an animal energy—this is indeed the same animal energy that Inanna too must respect. Thus, it is in precisely the moment of the two men’s clash, when they are “grappled, holding each other like bulls ... [snorting] like bulls locked together” (NKS, p. 5) that their friendship is born.

There is another way to discuss the potency that is shared between the two figures. I have mentioned already that Gilgamesh has frequently been called the first hero of the modern tradition—but notably, before this first hero, a different kind of mortal male had taken center-stage in peoples’ myth and ritual. I have discussed this older ideal in terms of Dumuzi and the male fertility god, but there is another name for this ancient expression of the paramount masculine, and that is the *heros* (Gottner-Abendroth, 1980/1995; Jacobsen, 1976). The *heros*—which is the predecessor and etymological origin of *hero*—was

never a conqueror, but rather an expression of the ancient mythos known for ritually renewing life in partnership with the Goddess. He was, in other words, a mortal representative of the ancient tradition of the male fertility god. As Gottner-Abendroth (1980/1995) put it:

The Goddess is represented by her priestess, or Sacred Queen; she is the active deciding partner. The *heros*, or Sacred King, is, on the other hand, the human delegate with whom the Goddess, personified by the priestess, bonds, in order to bestow new life upon her people. (p. 12)

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is thus fascinating in part as the place where this ancient *heros* tradition is first supplanted by the new motif of the hero. Jacobsen (1976) similarly saw the *Epic* as the meeting place of “these two nonliterary lines of tradition, one about a power for fertility in the netherworld (the Heros line), one about a famed warrior and wall builder of old (the Hero line)” (p. 209). At stake in this clash between hero and *heros* is the identity of men and in particular of kingship. Like Enkidu and Gilgamesh clashing bodily in the middle of the street, so these images of paramount masculinity wrestled in ancient myth and culture.

Unfortunately for the Goddess’s sacred cedars, the *heros* line—at least in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—lost the clash. For all his

vital strength, Enkidu could not compete with the forethought of a more rationally calculating opponent. One finds, here, the beginning of the defeat of participatory traditions by modernity's ideal of instrumental rationality.

Immersion in the living ecological present is a fundamental aspect of participation, and could be described as the root of Enkidu's natural strength. Yet, this dependence also makes Enkidu vulnerable—his present-moment animal instinct is predictable, and so Gilgamesh outmaneuvers him with cunning plans. One might say that the rational manipulations and technologies of modern civilization have similarly outmaneuvered the otherwise overwhelming power of the natural world—at least briefly. Such changes reflect a shifting calculus between instinct and rationality, so that now the ancient *heros* or Wild Bull can be defeated—alongside the Goddess he loves—by the clever and conquering new hero.

Thus Enkidu falls—coming to serve and eventually die for the one he was meant to oppose. Even so, Gilgamesh's admiration for the wild-man never fades, so that in the end he sings laments for his friend. While the hero and the *heros* may be diametrically opposed, they are also in some mysterious way profoundly linked—like destined enemies and sworn brothers, like Enkidu and Gilgamesh. The paramount male warlords of

modern cities still work out in gyms and admire wild instinct and embodied potency, for they correctly suspect—as did Nietzsche (1872/1993)—that if the root of vitality is lost, “the man of culture [shrivels] up into a mendacious caricature” (pp. 40–41).

Perhaps, then, Gilgamesh’s greatest cunning of all was to channel rather than suppress the power of ancient instinct as represented by Enkidu. Just as Gilgamesh himself retained an embodied and instinctive power in his own violent way, so it is clear that much of his success stemmed from the presence of Enkidu by his side. Thus, it should no longer be surprising to find a sincere grief in Gilgamesh at the death of his primal twin—for rationality and animal instinct live inextricably entwined in each of us. As the fate of the human psyche and the world’s natural ecologies continue to evolve together, hand-in-hand, it falls to us to reflect on the shape of the relationship between these two powerful forces that are creating the future.

Lamenting the Cedars

In Gilgamesh’s case, while there may be grief, there is no indication of remorse or regret. In spite of the fact that the tyrant is largely to blame for the death of his sole friend and brother, he shows no evidence of real introspection following Enkidu’s wasting away, except perhaps in an escalating

awareness of his own mortality, a growing existential terror, and an intensifying commitment to his own burning desire to find some way to live forever.

This becomes the goal to which he will devote the rest of his life. What remains of the *Epic* consists of Gilgamesh's doomed quest for personal immortality. Not only does he never find immortality, he also never finds peace, and never seems even to mature toward introspection or wisdom. His life, rather, becomes a testament to the emptiness of the conquerer, for in his ceaseless campaign to rule over life and death, he has spurned marriage to the Goddess and caused the death of his only friend. He has waged a war against ecology and ended up fittingly alone, divorced from life, an isolated tyrant of a city walled within and without. As Sjöö and Mor (1987) put it, Gilgamesh

is left alone with his famous name. Civilized, morbidly self-conscious man's desire to overcome earth, and death, and the bondage of flesh and woman, only creates a vaster kind of death for himself. For he has killed off everything sacred, now he must truly die alone. ... Significantly, the murder of the forest always leads to the desert. Deserts always seem like ancient environments, but in fact they are the youngest environments on earth. Most deserts are

manmade. They are what's left after everything else has been "conquered" or used up. (p. 283)

There is a decisive moment in the *Epic*, before Gilgamesh has begun his conquest of cedar mountain and ensured his lifelong isolation. He and Enkidu are climbing up toward the peak where Humbaba awaits. In the dark of the night, the warlord is awoken by a terrible dream. It is, in fact, the last of a series of visions that have plagued Gilgamesh throughout the journey to the mountain. It is a final warning, and it seems to be the worst of the lot, so that Gilgamesh wakes up, crying out to Enkidu in the darkness:

Did you call me, or why did I wake? Did you touch me, or why am I terrified? Did not some god pass by, for my limbs are numb with fear? My friend, I saw a third dream and this dream was altogether frightful. The heavens roared and the earth roared again, daylight failed and darkness fell, lightnings flashed, fire blazed out, the clouds lowered, they rained down death. Then the brightness departed, the fire went out, and all was turned to ashes fallen about us. Let us go down from the mountain and talk this over, and consider what we should do. (NKS, p. 9)

With the added perspective of today's ecological crises, the apocalyptic imagery of Gilgamesh's nightmare takes on

renewed power. Yet even at the time, it is enough to cause Gilgamesh to hesitate, to briefly consider the price of the path he had chosen. This is, in fact, his only moment of hesitation in the entirety of the *Epic*. But in the morning light, with the ominous dream becoming a fading memory, Gilgamesh chooses to double down, to continue his ascent, and to wage his war against the wilderness and the fertility gods that dwell within.

The warlord's speech upon his rejection of the goddess is his most explicit statement of inner motives. His reasoning for the rejection is fundamentally that to embrace the Goddess is to embrace the mortal condition: its glory, its vulnerability, its decline, its death. Gilgamesh refuses to accept such mortal constraints—and this is really the heart of who the warlord is, the root of his "heroism." This is the origin of a psychology of victory that refuses to accept any defeat, especially the final defeat that awaits at the end of every mortal life.

The curse of isolation with which Gilgamesh lives is different than the curse of sickness that slays Enkidu, but in a way, the source of both is the same. For both Gilgamesh and Enkidu have attacked the wellspring of life itself. In doing so, the two achieve a degree of alienation greater than any before. In Enkidu's case, such an alienation amounts to suicide, for his

own nature is too closely bound up with the vital root of life for him to survive divorce from it.

Gilgamesh, on the other hand, is able to live the rest of his life—but it is a life of alienation from ecology, from the community of life: this is the kind of alienated living to which modernity is heir. In this way, Gilgamesh may indeed be the first hero of the modern tradition—as dubious as such a title may be. The final passages of the *Epic* are filled with this first hero trying to console himself by admiring the size of the walls he has built, with the notion that his name, at least, will linger. Such a shift from original ecological participation toward material possession and legacy seems to be part of the *Epic* and of the historical transition it represents. As Sjöö and Mor (1987) put it:

The sources of our biological lives remain the same as they always were—they come from Matter and Land. But city-man maintains contact with his natural life-sources not through immediate body-experience, but through an artificial medium of exchange: money. He no longer works with the earth, he buys it. (p. 282)

Given this link between the arc of the *Epic* and the birth of urban civilization, I close this chapter with one more look at the comparison between contemporary ecological crisis and Gilgamesh's warning dreams. As Gilgamesh foresaw:

The heavens roared and the earth roared again, daylight failed and darkness fell, lightnings flashed, fire blazed out, the clouds lowered, they rained down death. Then ... the fire went out, and all was turned to ashes fallen about us.

(NKS, p. 9)

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduce the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as both heir to the old Sumerian mythic tradition and modern deviation from it. In the vision of ecological apocalypse wrought by a conqueror terrified of death and obsessed with conquering wilderness, one finds conveniently summarized some of the results of that deviation.

Death and regeneration have always been intrinsic to life, and thus intrinsic to the ancient myths. Destruction is nothing new. But while a new year would traditionally birth a renewed fertility god into ancient Sumer's various local mythologies, it takes considerably longer for an ancient grove of cedars to once again take root—and it takes a great deal of time indeed for a land to recover from the ecocide that has made it into a desert.

CHAPTER 6: THE TWINING TWINS OF LIFE

And a lust for life
A lust for life

Keeps us alive
Keeps us alive
(Del Rey, 2017)

The River That Ran From Sumer to Greece

Mythic influences, I suggest in Chapter 3, can behave like subterranean groundwaters, seeping invisibly through time, crossing the boundaries of apparently distinct societies, making a clean delineation between the gods in one place and time and another a fuzzy proposition. The origination of the mythos of the fertility tradition cannot therefore be accurately pinpointed in history, for it reaches back into the mists of prehistory, perhaps even into primordial and prehuman origins, and so can only really be sourced in the dreamlike generativity of the imagination itself. Mesopotamian myths are but the oldest recorded exemplary tradition available—albeit a prolific and rich example of such.

I detail something of this first recorded upwelling—that of archaic Mesopotamia—in the preceding chapters. Some 2,000 years would pass between the Sumerian flourishing and the Classical forms of Dionysianism elaborated by the Greeks. Yet, between Ancient Sumer and Classical Greece, a rough sketch of the evolving fertility traditions can be traced—thereby completing this account of the lineage of the fertility gods and the ecological mythos found at the roots of modernity.

One can begin with the most immediate and obvious heirs of the Inanna-Dumuzi partnership: namely, the figures of Ishtar and Tammuz. This pair is usually associated with the later Babylonian civilization, but in fact the appearance of Tammuz or Tammuzi is first found alongside that of Damu and Dumuzi in ancient Sumer itself (c.f. Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021). Tammuz and Dumuzi were originally only dialectical variations of that widespread and ancient Sumerian god, and contemporary associations of Dumuzi with Sumer and Tammuz with Babylon is probably simply explained by the fact that the “Dumuzi” pronunciation at some point declined. Thus, Dumuzi became associated with the form of the god appearing in the ancient context, whereas Tammuz became associated with the figure’s continued manifestations in the post-Sumerian world, especially in Assyria-Babylon (c.f. Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021).

One should not be surprised, then, to find that the Babylonian Tammuz was very much similar to Dumuzi: a god of herds and shepherds, agriculture and the harvest, death and rebirth, and partner to the Goddess of love and fertility. Indeed, Inanna can be seen to undergo a parallel name change in the transition from the Sumerian to the Assyrian context: she came to be known predominantly as Ishtar. Like Tammuz-Dumuzi,

Inanna-Ishtar is often lumped together into a single deity, for both the mythic parallelism and the historical link between the Sumerian and Babylonian figures is clear.

This Sumerian-Babylonian comparison is really nowhere disputed. Yet, if one is willing to accept the logic of evolving mythic figures as extending from Sumer to Babylon, then by the same logic it becomes hard to ignore the fact that the parallelism remains quite robust as one expands the view through the region and across ensuing centuries. As Frazer (1890/1994) put it:

Nowhere, apparently, have these rites been more widely and solemnly celebrated than in the lands which border the Eastern Mediterranean. Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis and Attis, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail the rites varied from place to place: in substance they were the same. (pp. 301-302)

Frazer (1890/1994), then, was unequivocal regarding a continuous fertility lineage extending forth from Sumer with little deviation from its core motifs. While the names and many details of the mythic figures certainly change across subsequent

millennia, many of the most ancient associations continue to appear with striking consistency. The river, the wellspring, and the wetlands associations, for example, as found in the earliest records of ancient Sumer, were still thriving millennia later not only in the aforementioned examples of Dionysius described in Chapter 3, but also in many intermediary figures across the reaches of the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia. Frazer (1890/1994) wrote, for instance, of a waterfall glen in Greece that was held as especially sacred within the pre-Dionysian tradition of Adonis, where

the river rushes from a cavern at the foot of a mighty ampitheatre of towering cliffs to plunge in a series of cascades into the awful depths of the glen. The deeper it descends, the ranker and denser grows the vegetation, which, sprouting from the crannies and fissures of the rocks, spreads a green veil over the roaring or murmuring stream in the tremendous chasm below. There is something delicious, almost intoxicating, in the freshness of these tumbling waters, in the sweetness and purity of the mountain air, in the vivid green of vegetation. ... Seaward the view is especially impressive when the sun floods the profound gorge with golden light ... falling softly on the varied green of the woods which clothe its

depths. It was here that, according to the legend, Adonis met Aphrodite for the first or the last time, and here his mangled body was buried. ... In antiquity the whole of the lovely vale appears to have been dedicated to Adonis. (pp. 309-310)

A great many of the symbols of the tradition commingle here in the play of water and rock, mist and sunlight, mountain air and dense woods—all within that enchanted glen where legend said that “Adonis met Aphrodite for the first or the last time” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 310). In such places—where the river meets the soil, green life flourishing on its banks—there especially the Goddess is seen across the ages meeting and being met by the Green Man, her mate. As the river moistens the fertile soil, so life springs once more engendered into mortal dance.

Another fertility pair makes these ancient associations even more explicit: that is, the example of the Semitic gods Baal and Baalath. Like the ancient Dumuzi and the later Dionysius, the male Baal was not only associated with rivers but also with the bull, with fertility and abundance generally, and was considered in particular as “the male power [identified] especially with water” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 308). The female Baalath, on the other hand, was identified “especially with

earth. On this view plants and trees, animals and men, are the offspring or children of the Baal and Baalath" (p. 308).

Rarely is the mythic symbolism made as explicit as this: in the Baal and the Baalath, the character of the Mountain Goddess and Wellspring God were spelled out unambiguous terms. The river's edge, then—like the wetlands as a whole—is an ecological manifestation of the symbolism of the place where these forces are seen to meet in cogeneration. The Adonis glen—where water crashes into mountainous rock and soaks the fertile soil throughout the green valley—is clearly one such place for the meeting of this ancient Goddess and God.

That said, while such sacred sites may be numinous and enchanting representations of the life-engendering meeting, the divine union itself is not confined to any particular sacred site or event. It is, rather, a fact ubiquitous in all life—and could be described as the nature of life itself. Frazer (1890/1994) touched on this insight when he noted that the meeting of the Baal and Baalath should not only be perceived at the river's edge, but rather understood as a phenomenon that occurs within all "plants and trees, animals and men" (p. 308).

It is here that the deeper essence of the fertility tradition begins to take form. That is, the outer ritual and mythos of seasonal fertility and food abundance begins to reveal itself as

the exoteric dimension of a tradition that also holds a more profound and hidden esoteric mystery. Otto (1965) developed such observations a bit further in the following:

Inherent in the Dionysiac element of moisture is not only the power which maintains life but also the power which creates it. Thus it flows through the entire human and animal world as a fertilizing, generative substance. ... The learned [Greek] Varro was very well informed when he declared that the sovereignty of Dionysus was not only to be recognized in the juice of fruits whose crowning glory was vine but also in the sperms of living creatures. (p. 164)

This “Dionysiac element of moisture” cannot then be defined as belonging to any single domain. It is elemental, it is vegetal, it is animal, and it exceeds any of these. Whether appearing in the rising sap of the tree, the flowing waters of the river, or the “sperms of living creatures”—or even, I would argue, in the upwelling waters of the underworldly psyche—this “Dionysiac element of moisture” has since the most ancient recorded myths been taken to inseminate the ecological cosmos with pregnant and undetermined possibilities. One finds, then, a deeper esoterica indeed than any simplistic notions of a “primitive vegetation cult.”

This was Frazer's (1890/1994) limitation: a tendency to see all examples of the fertility traditions and the ever-dying god as only "a dramatic representation of the decay and revival of plant life" (p. 333). Such literalist viewpoints tend to suspect that any deeper reading of the ancient myths and rites is a fantastical projection onto the past—but on the contrary, why should one assume that ancient or indigenous peoples have ever lacked in deep thought or feelings? Surely, poetry and ineffable intuition regarding life and cosmos are universal human birthrights.

There is every evidence and every reason to imagine, then, that ecological peoples throughout time have deepened into poetics and symbolisms of ecology as profound as any theologian's vision. Thus, in contrast to anthropological literalism such as that of the Frazerian interpretation, there is good reason to believe in Otto's (1965) assertion that "the meaning of a true god is never so limited that it could be exhausted by the idea of growth in plants" (p. 189). Weston (1920/1997) concurred, noting that the worship of Green Man figures like Tammuz

is not to be regarded merely as representing the Spirit of Vegetation; his influence is operative, not only in the vernal processes of Nature, as a Spring god, but in all its

reproductive energies, without distinction or limitation; he may be considered as an embodiment of the Life principle, and his cult as a Life Cult. (pp. 35–36)

This is right as far as it goes. More precisely, he may be considered as the embodiment of about one half of the mythos of the Life Cult, for his waters of life would surely do nothing much on their own. The seed only comes to life when held by the soil—and this, too, was understood as a mystical phenomenon present at every level. It was the same at the river's edge as within the animal womb—life always growing from the meeting of soil and seed, Baal and Baalath.

Women and men seem to have equally derived meaning from and involved themselves within in this larger tradition—and this involvement was generally without discrimination: women seem to have worshipped the God and men the Goddess as easily as the other way around. The famous *maenadism* of Dionysius is a clear example—indeed, to judge from portrayals such as Euripides's (405 B.C.E./1990) *The Bacchae*, one might conclude that the Dionysian tradition in Greece may have been predominantly administered by women. Women have indeed long played central roles in the traditions of the male fertility god; as has already been seen in previous chapters, for example, the Goddess and her representative priestesses seem to have

been the main characters—besides the god himself—within the Dumuzi ritual cycle of Sumer. As Bottéro (2001) wrote: “The Mesopotamians were proud of this and readily noted the absence of priestesses as marking the primitivism of certain foreigners” (p. 121).

Perhaps the most striking example of this recurrent centrality of women in the rites of the fertility god occurred in many different lands at the seasonal event of his death. These were the Goddess “Lamentations” or “Wailings”—the same grief-stricken hymns that Gilgamesh appropriated in his eulogy for Enkidu—which were traditionally recited by a woman or group of women gathered at the river’s edge upon the occasion of “the disappearance of Tammuz from this upper earth, and the disastrous effects produced upon animal and vegetable life by his absence” (Weston, 1920/1997, p. 35). Within these widespread rituals, the singer or singers would personate the goddess herself—not singing to her, but singing in her stead, channeling her divine grief. Weston (1920/1997) described the Lamentations:

The woes of the land and the folk are set forth in poignant detail, and Tammuz is passionately invoked to have pity upon his worshippers, and to end their sufferings by a speedy return. This return, we find in other texts, was

effected by the action of a goddess, the mother, sister, or paramour, of Tammuz, who, descending into the nether world, induced the youthful deity to return with her to earth. (p. 35)

One might say that the priestesses who chanted on behalf of the Goddess formed an enactive link between the mortal and mythic world—reaching out to touch the God on behalf of the Goddess and the people—which is the precise inverse of what the ecological kings did when they reached out to touch the Goddess on behalf of the God and the people. One begins to see how deeply the complementarity of the ecological partnership runs—and how profoundly it suggests a cocreative mutuality between the gendered archetypes.

While Gilgamesh may have toppled the ecological kings from their place of honor, at least in the city centers, it is clear that women's passionate and supportive involvement with the male fertility god nevertheless persisted. Weston (1920/1997), for example, noted that even several thousands of years post-Sumer, "the most noticeable feature of the [Adonis] ritual was the prominence assigned to women. ... Thus in the tenth century the festival received the Arabic name of *El-Bûgat*, or 'The Festival of the Weeping Women'" (pp. 44-45). The similarity here to the themes of the Sumerian Lamentations is not a

coincidence, for as Frazer (1890/1994) summarized, at such latter-day Adonis festivals

the death of the god was annually mourned, with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women; images of him, dressed to resemble corpses, were carried out as to burial and then thrown in the sea or into springs; and in some places his revival was celebrated on the following day. (p. 331)

The persistence of this ritual, down to its details, is quite extraordinary given the vast distances in time. In particular, it is worth noting that from ancient Mesopotamia down to Classical Greece and into surviving Adonis rituals even a millennium later, both the Goddess herself and the human priestesses who personated her were understood as magically and passionately supporting the resurrection and return of the powers of life-giving male potency—which waned, as they always do, in the season of death. In the light of rituals like this, some Goddess reconstructionists have similarly recognized that

there was an era, before the patriarchal revolution took effect, when women and men cooperated in equality, producing and creating and worshipping together. The son of the Mother was her mature lover and mate. ... Sexual union fuses the separate emanations of the divine. (Sjöö & Mor, 1987, p. 218)

This mysticism of sexual union—which enfolds ecosexual and cosmic as well as human and animal dimensions of sexuality—was at the heart of the tradition of the fertility gods. In the cocreative dance between such “separate emanations of the divine,” one does not find competition or hostility between the Goddess and the God—nor, as has been seen, did such sectarianism generally characterize the tradition’s human followers. Not only can one point to examples like the Lamentation rituals as evidence for this, one can also refer to the ceremonies of divine marriage, which were coed celebrations and enactments of the generative union of the Goddess and the God. As Frazer (1890/1994) put it:

Of Aphrodite and Adonis in Syria, of Cybele and Attis in Phrygia, and of Isis and Osiris in Egypt ... in every case a human couple acted year by year the parts of the loving goddess and the dying god. We know that down to Roman times Attis was personated by priests who bore his name. (p. 656)

Since the earliest of mythic records, and continuing throughout subsequent periods, the goddesses and gods of the fertility tradition appeared consistently in close partnership formation. Given this consistency, I would suggest that it is impossible to justify a depiction of a Dying God or Great

Goddess tradition from such periods as historically authentic without close reference to the other, which was its creative complementarity. It was always a dual tradition, as life itself emerges from a conflux of creative forces—like the Baal and the Baalath, the water and the soil, which mingle in myth and in truth to engender new growth on the banks of the rivers.

Daughters of Ishtar, Sons of Tammuz

There are many more examples of fertility pairs between Sumer and Greece that one can consider. For instance, there was the goddess Astarte and the god Eshmun, from the region of Lebanon and Byblos. While not much is known about the unique myths and rituals surrounding these two, they are worth mentioning as the direct predecessors of the Classical cult of Aphrodite and Adonis, who were in turn not only popular Mediterranean gods in their own right but also major influences on the evolution of Dionysianism. Indeed, while the etymology of the name “Aphrodite” has been lost to time, it is not an originally Greek name, and the consensus is that its origins are indeed Semitic (see West, 2000). As Anderson’s (1990) summarized: “In the Greek and Roman worlds Astarte became Aphrodite and Eshmun was known as Adonis—and their cult was to spread first to Athens and other parts of Greece and later through the Roman world” (p. 36).

The transformation of Astarte and Eshmun into Aphrodite and Adonis—which was largely complete “as early as the seventh century before Christ” (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 302)—and the subsequent transplanting of this pair into Greek culture and mythos, could be said to represent the first major arrival of the ancient lineage of Inanna and Dumuzi into mainland Europe. One could consider Minoan Crete as an older European example—but the script of that island civilization is still untranslated and the origins of Minoan culture and religion are obscure.

In any case, an association of Dionysianism with Asiatic influences was very present in the popular mind of the Greeks and this association never really faded. There was, for example, Dionysius’s long-lasting association with far away India—as Anderson (1990) described this myth: “After rescuing his mother Semele from Hades, he set off on a journey to India, introducing the world to the delights of wine, ecstasy and intoxication” (p. 39). Similarly, in the opening act of Euripides’s (405 B.C.E./1990) *Bacchae*, the god re-enters the Greek world from some unknown Eastern land—possibly India—bringing along with him a cohort of foreign maenads engaging in unfamiliar ecstatic dances and wilderness mountain rites.

Otto (1965) noted that such tales of Dionysian arrival from distant lands were part of a broader motif of epiphany. The god

often appears as a semi-foreigner, half-alien, perhaps not entirely welcome—especially within more domestic contexts such as within the city. His sudden and disruptive presence typically arrives from across the sea or somewhere beneath the waters, and he might disappear just as suddenly into those waters once more (c.f. Otto, 1965). Having reviewed the earlier Sumerian tradition, one can now recognize that such patterns of watery birth and death are part of a seasonal flux and flow, and are rooted in the ever-dying god's rhythms as ancient deity of the wetlands, rivers, and wellsprings.

In the case of Dionysius, one may also conjecture that these motifs combined with realities of Dionysian influence historically arriving from overseas, as with the aforementioned influx of the Near East cult of Aphrodite and Adonis. Across the sea in another direction, the Greeks found more parallels and influences in the Egyptian myths of Isis and Osiris, which one finds frequently match those of Dionysius down to precise details (c.f. Herodotus, ca. 430 B.C.E./1920, 2:42:2). All of this, plus the likely influence of the seafaring Minoans on the fertility traditions of the entire region some centuries before (c.f. Kérenyi, 1976; Evans, 1988; Sjöö & Mor, 1987), may have combined to create a memory of Dionysius as a god who arrives

from abroad, from the East, from the waters—and thus history may have entwined here with the myth’s deeper themes.

Regarding the specific influences of Aphrodite and Adonis, one should be careful not to conflate the figure of Astarte-Aphrodite, found in traditional partnership with a Green Man figure, with the later expression of Aphrodite as found amongst the Olympians—for the older form is much more faithful to the patterns of the traditional fertility gods. Interestingly, this notion that may really be two different “Aphrodites” is not a new idea; it was already well-established by the time of the early Greeks. Hesiod (8th-century B.C.E./2020), for example, described Aphrodite as originating in a prehistoric ocean—born in a Titanic age, from the mingling of the primordial Mother-Waters with the seed of the severed genitals of the Titan-Father Uranus. On the other hand, Homer (8th-century B.C.E./2013) described Aphrodite as the daughter of Zeus and the Titaness Dione, which would make her at least half-Olympian and not nearly so foreign from the perspective of the patriarchal gods of Olympus.

Making sense of this divergence, Plato (ca. 380 B.C.E./1980) asserted that the two origins were actually of two different goddesses: one *Aphrodite Ourania*—which is usually translated as “Heavenly Aphrodite” but whose name clearly

points to her Titanian origins with *Ouranos*—and one *Aphrodite Pandemos*, “Aphrodite Common to [our later Greek] People.” It would seem that by the time of Homer’s Olympians, and certainly by the time of Plato, the figure of Aphrodite had been heavily co-opted and diluted by the patriarchal values of the Hellenic aristocracy. This itself is not a surprising event; what is more historically unusual is that the Greeks so clearly remembered the image of the ancient goddess alongside their newer appropriated form: a mythic double-vision which necessitated the need for this distinction in origins.

In any case, one is reminded in this mythic tumult of the similar transitions found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* some millennia before, in which Inanna and Dumuzi wrestled with parallel changes in human society and religion. Much like Dumuzi had previously, Adonis became a somewhat more obscure figure, and was more or less supplanted as husband of the newer Aphrodite figure. Meanwhile, much like Inanna, Aphrodite was absorbed into the new urban pantheon under its ruling sky god—and yet always, notably, remained a problematic case for the Olympic authority. That is, even in her Olympian form, Aphrodite seems to have been a rather subversive goddess with a tendency to undermine patriarchal institutions, especially that of her new marriage to the Olympian, Hephaestus.

If one accepts Hesiod's (8th-century B.C.E./2020) origin story, it would only have been this marriage that made Aphrodite an Olympian at all. Given the historical context and judging by the goddess' mythic infidelities, one might wonder to what extent this was a marriage of choice in the first place. If Aphrodite's secret identity, so to speak, was actually the ancient fertility goddess who predated Olympic authority, her infidelities become more than sympathetic—they become justified and liberatory. For if one accepts this account, the goddess of love was not some gentle and soothing dove—indeed, relative to the Olympians, she would not have really been a goddess at all, but a leashed Titan, with her Olympian marriage reinforcing that chain.

Certainly “love” itself, however romanticized and made to pull at the sledges of domesticity, remains rooted in some very ancient, animal, and primordial themes. Such primal themes, as seen in previous chapters, belonged to the ancient fertility tradition, which stretched back to Sumerian Mesopotamia and beyond—as, it seems, did Aphrodite herself. Thus, alongside such a Titanic Aphrodite, one imagines that if the Classical Greeks were to behold the vegetal-bestial-shapechanging figure of the ancient Green Man, such as Wild Bull Dumuzi, they would have similarly considered him more Titanic than godly.

There is evidence that they did, at times, perceive just that, for even as the ancient and wild Goddess remained barely concealed behind the Greek Aphrodite, so the primal potency of her ancient partner remained always just behind the semi-tamed presence of Dionysius. For example, Dionysius was only sometimes considered to be one of the Olympians, for like Hades who was also not typically counted among that heavenly number (c.f. Hansen, 2005), Dionysius's wild and *chthonic* associations would tend to marginalize him within the more political world of the upper-class and urban Hellenes (c.f. Chadwick, 1976). One can see why, then, in reviewing the works of Homer, that the God of Ecstasy is generally referred to not by the more typically Olympian title of *theos* but more often as *daemon*—a word that even then carried primordial and wild connotations. Nietzsche (1872/1993) made a similar distinction, noting: "The Apolline Greeks also saw the effect of the *Dionysiac* as 'Titanic' and 'barbaric'" (p. 26).

In truth, as I put forth in greater detail in Chapter 7, the integration of these two principles—which may also be described as the modes of participation and instrumental causality, respectively—is key to the full flourishing and actualization of human consciousness. Perhaps one cannot separate Nietzsche's (1872/1993) stark division of the two gods

from his own eventual decline and instability. The challenge of this integration, however, is far bigger than any individual—as we have seen, it is a challenge that stretches back to the very roots of modernity. No wonder integrating Aphrodite smoothly into the hierarchy of Olympus was a challenge—for her myth traced back directly into wilder and more participatory roots, into a fertility partnership with the nature god Adonis, and beyond that, into an inheritance of a traditional throne and primordial power far older than that of Zeus.

Adonis and the Arboreal Birth

The name Adonis is not really a proper name at all, but rather an honorific close to the biblical *Adonai*; as Frazer (1890/1994) put it: “The true name of the deity was Tammuz: the appellation of Adonis is merely the Semitic *Adon*, ‘lord’, a title of honour by which his worshippers addressed him” (p. 302). Adonis, then, may have originally been something of a general reference to the ancient male fertility figure and was so used in various lands, becoming “very popular in Syria and Phoenicia as *’ădōnî* (my lord) and in Hellenistic lands as Adonis” (Mueller, 2018, para. 1).

Given this reference of the same general title for various local instantiations of the male fertility god, it seems that the ancients themselves may have been implicitly aware of

something like Frazer's (1890/1994) assertion that "the true name of [Adonis] was Tammuz" (p. 302)—that is, that in Adonis they were dealing with an ancient and cross-cultural figure. One does find plentiful parallels between the two mythic bodies. For example, one may recollect the Sumerian Ningishzida, as well as the related child god Damu, whom Jacobsen (1976) described as "the power of the rising sap" (p. 27). As I describe in Chapter 4, Ningishzida and Damu—the tree and the sap—were closely linked, arguably even two forms of the same god. In any case, both certainly belonged to the broader domain of Dumuzi: *Damu* is, as Jacobsen (1976) pointed out, only a grammatical diminutive: *little Dumuzi*.

With this in mind, it is striking that in the Adonis myths, one finds amidst the core images both the divine child and the divine tree. The most popular version of the myth features the infant Adonis's birth from an arboreal mother. As Anderson (1990) summarized:

In the Greek and Roman telling of the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, Adonis is born from a tree. His mother Myrrha, fleeing from the consequences of committing incest with her father, prayed when she was about to give birth to be transformed out of her human form. The prayer was answered and she was changed into a myrrh tree. The

child was in the womb of the trunk and when the time came it split open to allow the birth of a beautiful boy (p. 36)

It is relevant to note, here, that another version of the Adonis myth has the god born not from the living tree but rather from a wooden chest, into which he had been placed by none other than Aphrodite. As Frazer (1890/1994) wrote: "In his infancy the goddess hid him [for his protection] in a chest" (p. 304). One might note that this version of the myth, almost certainly a later modification, would make the arboreal birth very easy to enact in a ritual setting.

In any case, the birth from both the tree and the wooden chest appears also on the other side of the Mediterranean, in Egypt, where the male fertility god was called Osiris. While it may run against contemporary critiques to broadly compare Osiris and Dionysius, it is hard to argue with the similarities given, for example, that Plutarch (ca. 100 C.E./1936, 264E) as early as the 1st century C.E. was asserting blandly that Osiris and Dionysius were the same god. Even 500 years before this, the Greek Herodotus (ca. 430 B.C.E./1920) was similarly claiming that "the Egyptians do not all worship the same gods in common except for Isis and Osiris, who, they say, is Dionysos" (2:42:2).

Of course, one could just as easily frame the above claim by describing Dionysius as a northerly appearance of Osiris. If anything, the Egyptian fertility gods are generally more faithful representatives of the ancient tradition than their Greek counterparts, for the Greeks seem to have somewhat demoted the role of the Goddess as an equally empowered cocreator (c.f. Sjöö & Mor, 1987). To the extent that Dionysius is found with a wife—that is, after the older Adonis-Aphrodite partnership fades from common view—it would be the semi-mortal Ariadne, a complex figure whom most of the time does not really appear as a fully fledged goddess, nor generally the equal of her divine husband.

Ariadne appears, rather, as something like the foremost of the maenads, the Dionysian priestesses; she is thus the presiding priestess and “mistress of the labyrinth” (Kérenyi, 1976, p. 118). The labyrinth was never a maze, and would make a poor maze indeed, given that its shape is that of a simple spiral containing a single clear path. Probably, the association with mazes comes from a confusion regarding the symbolism of getting lost or trapped in the labyrinth—something which is certainly a consideration given that the true labyrinth is none other than the ceremonial “dance ground” (p. 118) that leads

into and out of the ritualized underworld. To become trapped or lost in the underworld is, of course, a perennial concern.

According to Kérenyi (1976), such ritual dances were not only at the heart of the famous labyrinths of Minoan Crete but also in the subsequent Mediterranean mystery traditions, such as those “of Eleusis, Samothrace, and Thrace, that is, the Orphic mysteries” (p. 118). Thus, Ariadne could certainly be called an important figure as representative of the knowledge and leadership of such widespread maenadic rituals—she may indeed be considered an avatar of the Goddess, as the maenads generally may be seen as semi-supernatural figures in their powers of inspired ecstasy—but such would still seem like something of a demotion from the original role of the fully fledged Goddess who cocreated the renewal of life along with her ancient partner.

In considering these various images of the Goddess from the Greek context—Aphrodite, Ariadne, the maenads—the takeaway seems to be that the Goddess tradition undergoes significant transformations and dilutions from its older forms. The Eleusinian goddesses—represented in a generational formation as Demeter, the Mother, and Kore or Persephone, the Daughter—may be the most faithful and empowered example of that older Goddess tradition still found in Greece. Yet, just as

Ariadne appears as a relatively weakened spirit in the Greek examples of her husband's mythos (c.f. Sjöö & Mor, 1987), so the male fertility gods of Eleusis—while still present in the forms of Pan, Dionysius, Hades, and the divine child Iachus (c.f. Kerényi, 1967)—come to occupy a relatively minor role in the proceedings compared to the full partnership that once characterized the mythos. In other words, both in its Dionysian and in its Eleusinian manifestations, the fertility gods in Greece seem to present a gestalt of weakening union, the beginnings of an alienation within the traditional cocreativity.

Across the Mediterranean on the other hand, while Osiris may have been seen in many respects as synonymous with Dionysius, the Egyptian god's relationship with the Goddess remained far more robust. Isis and Osiris never stop appearing, in their mythos, as cocreative equals sharing responsibility for the regeneration of their ecology. Indeed, their role as ecosexual partners in the land's seasonal renewal comes across very clearly in Egyptian myth, such that one can almost imagine one is reading an account of Inanna and Dumuzi from a different river valley a few thousand years earlier. As Frazer (1890/1994) summarized:

Isis, the sister and wife of Osiris, discovered wheat and barley growing wild, and Osiris introduced the cultivation

of these grains amongst his people, who forthwith abandoned cannibalism and took kindly to a corn diet. Moreover, Osiris is said to have been the first to gather fruit from trees, to train the vine to poles, and to tread the grapes. Eager to communicate these beneficent discoveries to all mankind, he committed the whole government of Egypt to his wife Isis, and travelled over the world, diffusing the blessings of civilization and agriculture wherever he went. In countries where a harsh climate or niggardly soil forbade the cultivation of the vine, he taught the inhabitants to console themselves for the want of wine by brewing beer from barley. Laded with the wealth that had been showered upon him by grateful nations, he returned to Egypt, and on account of the benefits he had conferred on mankind he was unanimously hailed and worshipped as a deity. (pp. 367–368)

Dionysius, as has already been seen, undertook a similar legendary journey to the East, and for exactly the same reasons. The origins of these Eastern adventures make for a fascinating topic of speculation—especially given that in these legends, it is agriculture and related arts that is learned and taught, which fits quite strikingly with the historical picture of grain agriculture radiating out alongside the fertility traditions from

ancient Mesopotamia. However, the tale of Osiris does not end with these celebrations; it continues as follows:

When he returned to Egypt in triumph, he went to a banquet given by his brother Set, who secretly hated him and desired to rule in his stead. Set killed him by enclosing his body in a chest which was thrown into the Nile and floated out to sea. Isis, distracted with grief, went wandering in search of her husband's body. The chest had come ashore at Byblos and rested at the foot of a tree variously described as a tamarisk or a heather. The tree grew to an enormous size, enclosing the chest in its girth. (Anderson, 1990, p. 36)

Thus the imagery has come full circle back to Adonis and the arboreal birth. The symbolism of the wooden chest—which I have already suggested was a ritual stand-in for the wood of the tree—and the tree itself are brought together convincingly in the Egyptian version, for now the wood of the chest and the wood of the tree have literally merged, with the tree “enclosing the chest in its girth” (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). Osiris, within the chest, within the tree, is currently dead—whereas when Adonis was in the mother tree, he was not-yet-born. But within the mythos, these two states are in fact one and the same, for when

the ever-dying god dies, his rebirth is never far off. So it is as the Egyptian myth continues:

The King of Byblos had the tree cut down to serve as a pillar for the roof of his palace There it gave off so wonderful a scent that Isis heard of it and knew it must contain Osiris's body. She travelled to Byblos where ... she extracted the chest containing the body. She took the body back to Egypt, where she hid it in the swamps of Buto in fear of Set finding it. Set, relentlessly pursuing his quest of hatred, found the body, cut it into fourteen pieces and scattered them widely. Isis began her search again and regained every piece except the phallus, which had been devoured by a crab. She reconstituted his body, making a new phallus for it, and for the first time she performed on it the rites of embalmment, thereby resurrecting him to eternal life. (Anderson, 1990, pp. 36–37)

Osiris—with the help of the ancient Goddess, his partner—is reborn from the tree. Thus, he was not only, as the ancient Greeks observed, a close parallel to Dionysius, he was also extraordinarily close to Adonis. Both Adonis and Osiris were not only born or reborn from the wooden tree, but even more specifically from a wooden chest magically linked to the tree.

The meaning of this wooden symbolism comes into focus when one turns to the final detail of Osiris's rebirth—that of the wooden phallus that Isis crafts to make her husband whole and so restore him to life. With this in mind, one may turn again to the Adonis myth, in which it turns out that the god's life and death were similarly involved with a wound to the groin.

The Secret Heart of Dionysius

That the myth of Osiris turns on his divine wife reconstructing a wooden simulacrum of her dead husband's phallus may seem rather on the nose—but a deeper examination reveals rich layers of meaning. To reflect on this imagery, let us first return to Adonis where we left him at his arboreal birth from the mother tree Myrrha:

The child was in the womb of the trunk and when the time came it split open to allow the birth of a beautiful boy who would grow into an eager hunter and who attracted the love of Aphrodite. Despite her pleadings he hunted the fiercest beasts and was wounded in the groin by a wild boar, which is the beast of winter. (Anderson, 1990, p. 36)

In the previous chapter, I recount the Medieval legend of Percival and the Grail, in which it was notably a groin wound that plagued the Fisher King and thereby crippled the fertility of the land. As we have seen, it was traditionally the potency of

such ecological avatars—in cocreativity with the Goddess—that ensured the vitality of the entire ecology. Thus, a groin wound can be seen as a blow to the core of such vital powers—to the vital center of the god himself. Thus, Adonis’s groin wound, like that of the Fisher King, is a wound to the heart of the Green Man.

What is the heart of the Green Man? In fact, the heart of Dionysius was a central symbol in Orphic mysticism, for when the hungry Titans caught and devoured the fertility god, the Orphics held that only his heart went uneaten (c.f. Kérenyi, 1976). The goddess Athena rescued the organ at the last minute and concealed it within what the Greeks called the *cista mystica* or *liknon*—a winnowing basket that, in ritual, the Greeks would cover in turn with “a huge bearded mask wreathed with vine and ivy leaves” (Andersen, 1990, p. 40). This basket, covered by an early form of the Green Man’s foliate mask, was considered a sacred object of great power—how much moreso the heart of the god that was hidden inside? Indeed, the mystical power of that heart was well-known, for as the Orphic myth continued: “From the heart of Dionysos a love potion was made: this was given to Semele, daughter of the King of Thebes, so that she should fall in love with Zeus. Dionysos was reborn in her womb” (Anderson, 1990, p. 39). In other words, it was from the fertility

god's heart that he could be rebirthed—like Osiris, reconstituted from his essence.

A closer examination reveals something more about this essence, for the shape of the heart hidden in the winnowing basket was specific. As Kerényi (1976) put it, “What was carried about ... in a *cista mystica* ... could not ... be kept entirely secret. It was not a heart but a phallus. This is evident from the Orphic books themselves” (pp. 259–260). Specifically, what one found in the *cista mystica* was a phallus carved from the wood of a fig tree—a “Dionysos Hermes” (p. 195)—which the Greeks referred to as a Kadmos or Kadmios (p. 195). It was from this term that the mythic king Cadmus drew his name, and from which the playwright Euripides (405 B.C.E./1990) later drew for his character Cadmus in *The Bacchae*.

The Dionysian heart—the one organ that the Titans failed to devour, the same that was used to rebirth the god in the womb of Semele or, in other versions, from the fleshy thigh of Zeus—was actually no heart at all, but a phallus. As Kerényi (1976) put it, “The murder of the Divine Child was his reduction to an organ from which—or as which—he could be reawakened” (p. 267). That is to say, the male sexual organ—allied with and rescued by a goddess, and perceived in its most regenerative aspect—was taken as the true nature of the Dionysian heart.

Just as the wooden phallus, carved by Isis's hand, was required to regenerate Osiris, so the Dionysian phallus carved into fig-wood symbolized the essence of the fertility god, his irreducible and eternal form, from which his life could be reconstituted.

One can understand, then, why it was not a wound to the head or the heart that killed Adonis, but rather a slash to the groin, as a similar injury would later disable the powers of the Fisher King in Medieval Romance. Cut from his root, so to speak, the life and magical efficacy of the fertility avatar fades. Yet, this may not be his end, for as one finds in these myths of Osiris and Dionysius, resurrection is possible. The symbol of the wooden phallus in the magic of resurrection is particularly interesting, because it seems to suggest a connection to a vitality beyond that of the flesh. It is not a restoration of the flesh organ that heals Osiris, but identification with a new organ carved from an older substance: the wood of the tree.

In this sense, the Dionysian phallus—which was also called the *Kradiaios Dionysos*—did not simply happen to be carved of wood, nor was it carved from just any wood. It was fashioned specifically from fig-wood, a fact attested to by its very name, for as Kerényi (1976) put it,

“Kradiaios” can have two meanings, and this is the key to the secret. It can be derived either from *kradia* (“heart”)

or from *krade* ("fig tree"); in the latter case, it means an object made from a fig branch or fig wood. (p. 260)

Thus, *Kradiaios Dionysos* managed to imply "heart of Dionysius," "phallus of Dionysius," and "fashioned of fig-wood," all at once. One might liken this to the Sumerian cluster of Dumuzi-Ningishzida-Damu, with a body of associations including both the literal tree and the "power of the rising sap" (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 27) as an ecological and sexual force. With its fruiting body so suggestive of female sexuality, the wood of the fig tree carved into the Dionysian phallus surely held parallel resonances. As Otto (1965) put it:

The elements of moisture and procreation were revealed with unusual clarity in the fig tree, which was also sacred to Dionysus. After all, Priapus claimed it likewise. It is well known and certainly understandable enough that it should stand as a symbol for sexual intercourse. Phalli were carved out of fig wood. ... The swollen fruits with their juicy blood-red pulp must always have conjured up thoughts of secret significance. (p. 158)

The Ones Who Climb the Tree of Life

While the fig-wood may have born "secret significance" (p. 158), the association between Dionysius and trees was much broader than this. As Evans (1988) noted, Dionysius in general

was “called *Dendrites*, ‘The Arboreal One’” (p. 68). Frazer (1890/1994) wrote of the same broadly arboreal associations:

While the vine with its clusters was the most characteristic manifestation of Dionysus, he was also the god of trees in general. Thus we are told that almost all the Greeks sacrificed to “Dionysus of the tree”. In Boeotia one of his titles was “Dionysus in the tree”. His image was often merely an upright post, without arms, but draped in a mantle, with a bearded mask to represent the head, and with leafy boughs projecting from the head or body to show the nature of the deity. (pp. 396-397)

Such customs demonstrate the antiquity of the connection between the tree and the mask. As noted in Chapter 1 and as seen in repeated examples since, the foliate mask was not a Medieval invention, but rather reached back at least to Dionysian influences. While I have not seen any clear-cut cases of the foliate mask from before Dionysius, the arboreal associations of fertility gods and goddesses in general have been widespread—to take one example, there were tree gods to be found

in Palestine, where they came into conflict with the monotheistic cult of Yahweh. These cults included those of Baal and his sister-consort Anat, and also the goddess

Ashtaroth or Asherah who was both a goddess of the sea and a sacred tree. (Anderson, 1990, p. 35)

The goddess Ashtaroth or Asherah deserves note here, for “asherah” eventually became a broader term for “the symbol of the Goddess ... a conventionalized or stylized tree ... planted therefore at all altars and holy places” (Sjöö & Mor, 1987, p. 269). Such sacred tree iconography must have been a central symbol of the region, for the asherah was specifically attacked by biblical instruction of the time: “Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy, 16:21). Thousands of years after Gilgamesh, one might say, his campaign against the Goddess’s groves still echoed.

I have introduced the male fertility god as an arboreal figures—from the Medieval foliate masks to *Dionysius Dendrites* to the ancient Sumerian Ningishzida. However, this was no less the case for the Goddess. The tree is particularly striking as a motif that seems to be entirely shared between the fertility partners; it would be difficult to judge whether the God or the Goddess could make a more ancient claim. While *Dionysius Dendrites* may be traceable to older Sumerian figures like Ningishzida, the asherahs seem equally traceable to Inanna, who not only appears with the sacred cedars in the *Epic of*

Gilgamesh but also with the *huluppu* tree in what is likely an even more ancient myth.

What was the *huluppu*? Its botanical identification, if it ever had one, is long lost. But whatever its species, the *huluppu* was regarded as particularly sacred to the Goddess. As Kramer's (1938) reconstructed translation of the mythic fragments goes:

A tree, a huluppu-tree—On the [bank of] the pure
Euphrates ... had been planted ...

[The E]uphrates (was) its drinking water ...

To pu[re] Inanna's holy garden thou (?) shalt bring it ...

The la[dy] ten[ded(?)] the tree with her [ha]nd, she let it
stand (?) at [her foot (?)] ...

"When at last (shall I have) a holy throne that I may [sit]
on it?" concerning it she said ... "When at last (shall I
have) a holy bed that I may [lie] on it?" concerning it she
said. (pp. 4-5)

What is this tree that the Goddess would have as her bed and her throne? While the botanical identification of the *huluppu* may be unknown, its mythic identification seems fairly clear. As Campbell (1965) ventured, the *huluppu* seems to be the earliest recorded example of the "cosmic tree of life" (p. 64).

Such a Tree of Life may be as near to a universal motif as it is possible to find. Anderson (1990) put it thus:

Accounts of sacred trees are to be found in the myths of Oceania, the Americas and Africa as well as those of the Celts, Scandinavia, the Middle East, Greece and Rome, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which particularly contributed to the growth of Western civilization. ...

Common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam is the myth of Eden with its Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil round which the serpent is entwined. (p. 25)

Such a cosmic tree even became a major motif within the monotheistic religions, which seem to appropriate the symbol even as they forbid its pagan worship. Indeed, much Kabbalistic imagery emerges from the elaborate imagery of the Tree of Life—as Kamenetz (1994) summarized: “The cosmic tree grows with its roots in heaven, and spreads out through its *sefirot* into trunk, and main branches” (p. 199). While this Kabbalistic Tree is a rich mystical tradition in its own right, it is not a fundamentally original one—for much of its symbolism is ancient and cross-cultural (c.f. Campbell, 1965). Some of this inheritance includes representations of the Tree of Life “as an image of the cosmos, as a dwelling place of gods or spirits, as a medium of prophecy and knowledge, and as an agent of

metamorphoses” (Anderson, 1990, p. 23). In addition to all of these significations, one of the most striking of the recurrent symbols associated with the Tree is the one that Anderson (1990) named specifically in regards to “Judaism, Christianity and Islam” (p. 25): that is, this Tree is the one “round which the serpent is entwined” (p. 25).

The motif of the Serpent of the Tree is no more an invention of later world religions than the Tree itself. Both are borrowed directly from the old fertility traditions—indeed, amidst the very oldest examples, one can turn to Inanna’s *huluppu* tree: “At its base the snake who knows no charm (?) had set up for itself a nest” (Kramer, 1938, p. 5). On the other hand, one could also turn to Ningishzida, the most well-known tree god of early Sumer and the arboreal form of Dumuzi, who “had as his basic form that of the tree’s trunk and roots; however, the winding roots, embodiments of living supernatural power, free themselves from the trunk and become live serpents entwined around it” (Jacobsen, 1976, p. 7). Thus, whether looking at the fertility gods or the goddesses, one finds that amidst the oldest mythic records, such figures are rooted not only in arboreal images but also specifically in images of the sacred tree “round which the serpent is entwined” (Anderson, 1990, p. 25).

One might argue here that one or the other of these myths—whether Inanna’s *huluppu* snake or Ningishzida’s serpent-like roots—must have stolen the imagery from the other. This is certainly possible, but there is nothing in particular to suggest that it was the case, for the traditions of both the Goddess and the God seem to be very originally rooted in the mythos and imagery. Gendering the cosmic tree at all proves a difficult prospect; as the generative foundation of the world, the sacred tree can be imagined as feminine, as in the case of the asherah or the mother tree Myrhha, or as masculine, as with Osiris’s wooden pillar that mythically morphs into a wooden phallus. As far as the Sumerian myths go, given that they are the oldest available, there is simply no easy way to prove whether the tales of the *huluppu* or those of Ningishzida are of greater antiquity. Nor would it necessarily matter if one could demonstrate such a proof, for no doubt even older myths regarding the Tree of Life did once exist before these, and are long since lost to recollection.

In any case, the more supportable argument is that the Goddess and the Green Man are both fundamentally rooted in this tradition of the Tree of Life—for there is no arguing the fact that both, from their oldest recorded examples, are intimately involved with such arboreal imagery. Furthermore, because the

two figures and traditions were originally so closely entwined with one another, I would personally imagine that the myths of Ningishzida and those of Inanna's *huluppu* probably refer to the same symbolic tree, and that both would indeed be correct to claim this as their own authentic mythic symbol, for the fertility partners regenerated the world—and renewed the Tree of Life—together. One finds an intimation of something like this in Sjöö and Mor's (1987) description of the serpent as the presence of the male fertility god in his seminal and regenerative aspects, and in partnership with the Goddess: "The snake came to symbolize the phallus, male sexual energy. ... But these are not aggressive or misogynistic phallic images; rather, they seem to represent the phallus *serving* the Goddess, women, and the life processes of all" (p. 61).

This vision of the serpent as an aspect of the male fertility god finds a good deal of support. As is noted in previous chapters, the serpent is indeed one of the animal forms that the fertility god has been known to shift into. Furthermore, one title of Dionysius was specifically *Dionysius Perikonis*, the meaning of which "is very clear: it means the 'Dionysos who twines himself around the column'" (Kerényi, 1976, p. 196). As the column certainly stands for the sacred tree—as has been seen in

the case of Osiris—so *Dionysius Perikonis* was just as clearly the serpent who twined around it.

Alternatively, *Dionysius Perikonis* could be imagined as the climbing ivy, which like the serpent was known to entwine and climb the trunks of trees. As Kerényi (1976) put it, “In Attica he was not the column but the ivy, ‘Dionysos Kissos,’ ‘Dionysos the ivy,’ and in the palace of Kadmos as well, he took this form” (p. 196). As Otto (1965) detailed, the serpent and the ivy were together identified within the Dionysian tradition: both climbed trees and slithered along the ground; both were toxic and linked to visionary intoxication; and both were considered slow-moving and cold-blooded entities, at home in low and wet places. Such a manifestation of the Dionysian energy could be contrasted to the more popular, warmer, and excitable forms of the God of Ecstasy, such as those invoked by the passion and liveliness of red wine.

This serpent-and-ivy characterization links Dionysius to the more ancient and elderly forms of the Green Man, such as those found in Enki, Okeanos, and *Dionysius Limnaios*—the wise old gods of the cool mossy grottos, wetlands, and swamps. Notably, when Osiris is reconstituted—resurrected through the magic and devotion of the Goddess he loves—he returns in a form much closer in character to such underworldly figures. Bly

(1990) demonstrated his understanding of this cool character when he similarly linked the serpent to what he called The Beneath Father, who

retains his shape through many changes as snakes do. The Beneath Father, moreover, being a snake, associates with the spinal cord. It is said that a powerful snake of some kind lives in us at the bottom of the spinal cord. ...

The snake swims in the water, as well. The snake is the Lord of the Waters. Mythologically, then, the snake resembles the Wild Man, the King, and other beings who lie in the water at the bottom of our psyches. (p. 92)

The biblical account also had a serpent hiding somewhere about the base of the tree—which is symbolically much like “the bottom of the spinal cord ... the bottom of our psyches” (p. 92). That snake, the infamous serpent of Genesis, was “more crafty than any of the wild animals” (Genesis, 3:1). Most biblical accounts would have the serpent as an agent of evil—an unsurprising belief, given the perennial war of the monotheistic traditions against the ancient fertility gods. Even so, one may find a clue as to the true nature of this serpent in the biblical portrayal—for that crafty and ancient force was none other than the one who propelled humankind into novel states of consciousness and into the beginning of history.

As Sjöö and Mor (1987) wrote, “the snake was first of all a symbol of eternal life (like the moon), since each time it shed its skin it seemed reborn. It represented cosmic continuity within natural change—spiritual continuity within the changes of material life” (pp. 58–59). The skin-shedding and undulating serpent is a master shape-shifter—and in particular, a master of death and rebirth. So the serpent, climbing like ivy up the Tree of Life, “was seen as the vehicle of immortality” (p. 59). This was not an undying immortality like that sought by Gilgamesh, but was the immortality of the ever-dying god, the energy that extends through every death and like skin sloughing off from a snake, through every reformation.

If the Tree of Life is an image of cosmos, then what does it mean for the serpent to rise from the roots, to climb up the trunk, to move toward the branches? Perhaps the Tree of Life would strike a rather static image—a universe unmoving—if not for that serpent taking the shape of “its stylized image, the spiral ... the image of spontaneous life energy, its continuous flow” (Sjöö and Mor, 1987, p. 59). In the eternal movement of such a spiral, it becomes clearer what it might mean that: “to the serpent was attributed power that can move the entire cosmos” (p. 59). In such an image, one might find something of the deeper mysticism of the vegetal vines and writhing roots of

the Green Man, the serpent who climbs the Tree of Life—for these images appear near the center of the fertility traditions since before the beginnings of recorded time.

Generational Generativity

When Osiris was reborn, he returned transformed. Death had changed him—and indeed, this transformation was so stark that the new Osiris was unable to return to throne that he had once occupied. As another wisdom teacher returning from death once put it, Osiris had similarly come into something like the sentiment that: “my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Fortunately, having not only resurrected her husband’s body but also refitted it with a brand new and apparently well-functioning phallus, Isis was prepared to provide the needed heir:

She subsequently conceived by Osiris their son Horus, whom she was to bring up hidden in the swamps until he could avenge his father on his uncle Set. Osiris, after his resurrection, was vindicated by a tribunal of the gods. He could have resumed the throne of Egypt but he preferred to go to the underworld, where he welcomes the souls of the good. He is represented in paintings of the underworld as having a green face. (Anderson, 1990, p. 37)

Consider the major beats in this tale: the resurrected Osiris—Osiris of the Wooden Phallus, one might call him—is

henceforth associated with the underworldly swamps of Buto in which his dismembered body had been scattered. Such an underworld, as seen in Chapter 3, has not only associated with fertile waters, death, and rebirth, but also with symbols, dreams, and the subtle energies of soul—as in the case of Osiris, who into those dream-water realms: “welcomes the souls of the good” (Anderson, 1990, p. 37). In the Jungian tradition specifically, such a liquid dreaming underworld has been considered especially connected to the feminine *anima*—thus, it is striking that Osiris’s underworldly kingship is initiated through a groin wound or castration.

Initiation by groin or genital wound has been a traditional ritual into manhood in many societies (c.f. Bly, 1990); one might say that, in such cases, a man is not seen fully as a man until he has also become “like a woman.” To put in Cohen’s (1992) terms: “That’s how the light gets in,” for perhaps this crack or defeat or wound is precisely what is required to free the boy from the passions and expectations of a naïve masculinity that can otherwise only think in terms of penetrating, conquering, and triumphing. The groin wound initiation opens the psyche beyond this blindness. Through it, one might say, the anima can finally enter the man.

Properly facilitated, the groin wound does not kill the man—but it does change him. Osiris's new phallus is not a regeneration of the original flesh but instead a replacement in carved wood. It is as if, identified now not with the literal fertility organ but instead with the more symbolic and ancient fertility of the vegetal world, the god's relationship with the vital energies of life have shifted—not necessarily diminished, but certainly transformed. This helps to explain why Osiris cannot return to the ecological throne of Egypt, but instead—like Enki, or Dionysius of the Swamps, or the later Okeanos—he enters into the role of the elder and underworldly Green Man. This change is linked to the wooden phallus, and it is interesting to note in parallel that in the Greek rites, the Dionysian phallus of fig-wood was in particular an instrument of underworldly power, for the god was known to use it in “a mystic rite connected with his return from the underworld” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 260).

The transformation of the ecological god to an elder and underworldly form, while more an initiation than a demotion, does create a certain problem. Namely, it leaves behind a vacancy: who now shall occupy the ecological throne? For whether in the tales of Gilgamesh, Osiris, or Dionysius and the ravenous Titans—and historically, in the death of participatory cultures and the rise of a disenchanted materialism with its

titanic industries that strip the Earth of life for profit—one finds indications that the death of ecological kingship, far from some popular liberation, rather leaves behind a vacuum to be filled by ecocidal tyrants.

The Egyptian mythos, at least, appears to have recognized the land's need for an ecological king to reclaim the throne from such tyranny. Thus, even as Osiris took up stewardship in the underworld, so his heir was born: Horus, child of Isis and of Osiris of the Wooden Phallus. Horus would be raised within and eventually emerge from the underworldly swamps, just as river gods had been reborn out of the watery depths since time immemorial. In the proper season, Horus would reclaim the ecological throne from the tyrannical Set, rejoining the Goddess in the renewal all life (see Assmann, 1984/2001). Notably, this was not really the birth of a new god, but rather, as Matthews (2001) put it: "In a potent cycle of dismemberment, death, and resurrection, green Osiris is said to 'become' Horus, the child of his marriage to Isis" (p. 29).

The fact that Osiris becomes Horus, his own heir—just as Dumuzi had been known to die, be reborn, and return to union with the Goddess in every Sumerian generation—suggests once again the potential problem of incest within the fertility tradition. Indeed, this issue has come up repeatedly in various

instances—for example, one shouldn't fail to notice that in aforementioned Adonis myth, the opening act of the arboreal birth had the pregnant Myrrhha “fleeing from the consequences of committing incest with her father” (Anderson, 1990, p. 36).

A more subtle example appears in the version of the Adonis myth in which the baby god is born from a wooden chest. In that telling, Aphrodite and Persephone—again, two of the main Greek heiresses of the ancient fertility Goddess—both effectively fall in love with Adonis in a rather more jealous and intimate manner than would seem appropriate given that the god is still an infant (see Hansen, 2005). This seems just as perverse as the reported incest of Myrrhha's father—until one sees beneath the literalism in such cases to recognize the underlying symbolism: a cocreative dance between two energies that are effectively ageless in generational permutations. Adonis may seem to be an infant—and thus a generation removed from the besotted goddesses—but he is in essence the same ancient partner with which the Goddess has been cocreating since time immemorial, and with which she will continue to cocreate life's future. Hence, Aphrodite's and Persephone's romantic love for the baby god makes perfectly good mythic sense.

A similar situation is found when one takes a close look at the figure of Attis, another popular version of the male fertility figure around the Mediterranean, who

was to Phrygia what Adonis was to Syria. Like Adonis, he appears to have been a god of vegetation, and his death and resurrection were annually mourned and rejoiced over at a festival in spring. The legends and rites of the two gods were so much alike that the ancients sometimes identified them. Attis was said to have been a fair young shepherd or herdsman beloved by Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, a great Asiatic goddess of fertility, who had her chief home in Phrygia. Some held that Attis was her son. (Frazer, 1890/1994, p. 346)

How can Attis be both Cybele's son and her fertility partner? Taken literally, this is incestuous. As mystical symbol, however, this is simply a recognition of the phenomenal pattern of life's generation: that is to say, the entire drama of life's renewal and evolution, taken mythically, features two protagonists in ever-changing costumes. The mother and father beget the daughter and son, so that the brother and sister can in turn become the mother and father. Hence, not only did Osiris become his own son, but he was also married to his sister, for Isis and Osiris were also known to be sister and brother:

Osiris and Isis were the children of the earth god Geb, who was sometimes represented as covered in verdure, and of the sky goddess Nut. Osiris succeeded Geb as King of Egypt and took his sister Isis as his wife. (Anderson, 1990, p. 36)

Thus, the image is one in which the generations of fertility gods proceed as an endless pairing of two intertwining energies. The ritualized incest of certain royal lines—including famously that of the brother-sister pairing of some Egyptian pharaohs—might only be a superficial literalization of this deeper mystical truth. The mysticism itself, however, has nothing to do with incest—it is, rather, a perception of the underlying image of this twining pair, coiling their way through life and time.

More recent discoveries have revealed that the fundamental shape of life's genome is the double-helix. I find this extraordinary because it seems almost to be the exact shape of the image implicit in the ancient mythos, emerging at times in explicit artistic detail through the ages. Whether in the twining of vines pouring forth from the Green Man's foliate mask or in that oldest poetic imagery of serpents climbing the tree of life, one finds these twining spirals near to the heart of fertility mysticism since long before biology confirmed its genomic shape. Furthermore, in each of these examples, the mythic

spiral shines with a green quality, whether in the aspect of vines or of snakes—as in ancient Egypt, where “Horus himself is protected by Wadjet, the green snake, known as ‘the papyrus colored one.’ Elsewhere, Isis, his mother, also has a green aspect” (Matthews, 2001, p. 29).

At every turn of the spiral of DNA, the dual strands are joined by a molecular link. If each turn in this spiral is likened to a generation in time, then the linkages would be the moments of union, whether in biological conception or taken more broadly and universally. Such are the moments of cocreative joining between the two great energies of life’s eternal procession: the brother and the sister, the daughter and the son, the husband and the wife, the mother and the father, who in the fertility tradition are seen together—and only together—to revitalize life’s ecology in every generation.

These two green vines, the green Goddess and God, who have been glimpsed in shifting patterns in myths from various peoples in many lands, still seem to be spiraling up the pillar of time like serpents around a tree trunk. Perhaps more than any other symbol, this dual twining energy seems to describe the essence of the fertility tradition. This seems to be the case whether they are found in ancient Mesopotamia, in the civilizations of the Mediterranean, in depictions found carved

into the wood of churches in Medieval Europe, or in the contemporary reemergence of images of Mother Earth, of the Green Man, and of the conjoined spiral discovered to be the molecular shape of life itself.

CHAPTER 7: A TOUCH OF MUSIC

Like the pine trees lining the winding road
I've got a name, I've got a name
Like the singing bird and the croaking toad
I've got a name, I've got a name
And I carry it with me like my daddy did
But I'm living the dream that he kept hid
Moving me down the highway, rolling me down the
highway
Moving ahead so life won't pass me by
(Croce, 1973)

When Men Were Green and Dancing

I set out in this dissertation to investigate the oldest recorded examples of the archetype of the Green Man, from early Sumer up to the beginnings of Dionysianism in the pre-Classical Mediterranean. Having completed that review, the scope of this research has been fulfilled.

As I describe in the introduction, the origins of Green Man have typically been associated with Medieval church architecture (e.g., Lady Raglan, 1939). However, various scholars—including Frazer (1890/1994), Evans (1988), Anderson (1990), and Matthews (2001)—have recognized that the foliate

mask imagery can be traced to a more ancient heritage in the Classical Mediterranean, where one finds similar carvings and sculptures associated with gods such as the Okeanos and Dionysius. However, I have argued that this association too should be considered only one link in a much older chain.

I have theorized, in other words, that the archetype of the Green Man—which has increasingly, since Classical times, been associated with the leaf mask—in fact stretches back in various mythic and ritual forms to the oldest records of human history, and quite probably much further. The evidence that I have presented herein supports that hypothesis, for the various forms of Dumuzi of Sumer not only present a compelling origin for a slow evolution into later Dionysianism through various intermediate traditions across Western Asia and the Mediterranean, but furthermore can be seen representing many of the same essential themes and motifs as the much later Medieval Green Man.

Thus, the fact that a sense of this continuous tradition is so generally lacking from contemporary historical sensibilities would seem to be a gross oversight. Specific forms, in their various cultural contexts, have received some attention—for example, Anderson (1990) and Matthews (2001) have both given a good accounting of the Medieval Green Man. Similarly,

Dionysianism as a specific phenomenon of the Classical world has been thoroughly considered (e.g., Nietzsche, 1872/1993; Otto, 1965; Kerényi, 1976; Evans, 1988). As far as the more ancient Mesopotamian myths of Dumuzi and Tammuz, they have at least been given their due by Assyriologists (e.g., Bottéro, 2001; Jacobsen, 1976). Yet, what has been neglected in recent scholarship is the evidence that each of these, among many other examples, are instantiations of a larger cultural movement, if not a universal archetypal theme. Such an oversight is particularly striking when contrasted against the revival of a popular sensibility of the Goddess tradition as an interconnected whole.

In this sense, Frazer (1890/1994) had the boldness to clearly acknowledge what more sectarian scholars have not—that is, the evidence of a continuous and interconnected ecological fertility tradition stretching across great spans of history and geography. A few more recent visionary scholars, including Sjöö and Mor (1987), Evans (1988), Anderson (1990), and Matthews (2001), have similarly acknowledged such connections between the Medieval Green Man, Dionysianism, and earlier mythic cultures—including the Sumerians—but this recognition has been by far the exception within contemporary academia.

To neglect the historical reality of such a vast mythic metatradition is to create a blind spot in modernity's sense of cultural history. For example, such a neglect has reinforced an image of the male gods of Western lineage as almost entirely warlike and patriarchal—which as I have demonstrated herein is far from the truth. How different the picture becomes if male mythos is to be characterized by figures like Dionysius and Dumuzi, ecological wild-men, dancers, lovers, and so on—so very far from a portrait of conquering sky gods.

Hillman (1991/2014f) set forth his *therapeia* as a method of healing identities and images that have lost their essential place in things. As I describe in Chapter 2, the subjects of such *therapeia* are not individual persons, but the energies and figures of psyche and culture—especially those figures that have ended up scapegoated, demonized, cast into shadow beyond cultural recognition and honor. *Therapeia* seeks to retrieve and redeem such images for the sake of their “placing” (Hillman, 1981/2013a, p. 43) within the larger collective imagination, an act that is ultimately therapeutic both for what has been exiled and for the larger whole—which must be reunited with these alienated pieces of itself, as in the Lurianic interpretation of *tikkun olam*, the piecing together of the shattered fragments of the divine (c.f. Schwartz, 2011; Matt, 1995).

Such a praxis lends itself to the principle that wounds in psyche can only be worsened by further exile of what has already been demonized. What is wounded cannot be excised, so must instead be restored to its unique form of health and function in ecology—thus every archetype, every principle, every power must be given honor and treated according to its nature. Wounded masculinity is no different in this regard, and thus can only be healed by a restoration of healthy masculinity. This raises the question, though: where should one look for examples of healthy masculinity after thousands of years of displacement from the old ecological and mythic models? Thus, mythic excavation and stories of old ways come into view.

To retrieve memories of life-giving and relational masculinity from the cultural roots of modernity—to gather such images from the earliest recorded history—is radical in a moment when the cocreative and regenerative potentials of masculinity are under fundamental suspicion. Yet, as I have presented, the fact is that the paramount male gods of the earliest recorded history were not warmongers or rapists, but ecological spirits fundamentally concerned with the natural world's flourishing. These gods—the Dumuzis of Sumer being the earliest recorded examples—appeared hand-in-hand with ecological goddesses and were celebrated by women as well as

men. The prevalence and primacy of such figures throughout early mythos contradicts notions of traditional masculinity as limited to either patriarchal and violent figures or to minor supporting roles within Goddess traditions.

Myth is a force that moves invisibly but powerfully beneath the lives of people and cultures. As many Goddess feminists have articulated, the erasure of female divinities from the Western imagination represented a major blow to women's identities, impoverishing the possibilities of women's lives. Goddess reconstructionism has helped many women to reclaim such possibilities of identity by breathing life and dignity back into spaces of lost mythos. Many women have found this empowering and healing (see Raphael, 2000, for review).

What has been overlooked—occluded, in fact, by a binary sense of gender—is that a parallel erasure of masculine images has also taken place. A literalizing gender binary can only imagine a single category of man and woman, which loses the reality that just as there are many goddesses and many ways to enact this overlapping metacategory called “femininity,” so there is much more than a single monolithic myth of “masculinity.” One can take this a step further in recognizing that just as the remains of horned Cernunnos were buried beneath Notre Dam's altar, just as the male forest guardian

Humbaba was slain by Gilgamesh's axe, so the mythic picture too is one in which the dignity and memory of the ecological god was cut off and buried alongside that of the ecological Goddess. Why should the maleness of the conquering warlord make the tragedy of the Green Man less in need of remembering and healing?

No person or identity can be reduced to a single myth or archetype. Every man may find the Green Man somewhere inside him, planting trees and protecting seeds, just as every man may find the axe-wielding warlord—as, indeed, may every woman, every person—for the figures of mythos belong to soul, and soul flows like the waters of life within all psyche, unlimitable. How strange that a monolithic sense of male identity, especially heterosexual male identity, has prevailed through the midst of so much contemporary deconstruction of gender.

Masculinity is surely no more narrow by nature than femininity. The mythos of the Green Man is a clear example of this—for here is a figure of evident male potency who is altogether different from the patriarchal, disconnected, and dominating images that have come to fill up the contemporary imagination regarding manhood. The fact that such a figure of empowered ecological masculinity may be surprising or

controversial—the fact that the space of male identity in the imagination has become so narrow—is symptomatic of precisely how much mythos has been cut off, and for how long.

This curtailment of imagination profoundly hurts men, but also quite clearly hurts women, children, and the entire ecology of life. What does it do to mothers and sons when the mythic imagination is equipped solely with images of men as emotionally stunted conquerors? What does it do to sisters and brothers? Husbands and wives? If men themselves come to believe in this narrow vision, what do they do, in turn, to the whole world?

It would be one thing if such a vision were an accurate portrayal of the myths and images of masculinity through time—but the Green Man makes it clear that this is not the case. Thus, what the narrowed modern imagination is capable of perceiving regarding men is patently false compared to the possibilities of men's being. The imaginal limitation becomes, then, a painful and perplexing fact for humans who are capable of much more.

The amputated imagination of masculinity is not only an amputation of the imaginations of men; it also entraps others in a narrow space of what is imaginable regarding men. This dual entrapment, reinforced from within and without, forms a tight prison of ideas and images from which no exit can be found

except through some extraordinary escape artistry, deep tunneling into the bedrock of myth and soul—for example, through the excavation of ancient myths, or through the excavation of one's own deep instincts and embodied being. There are many men who, equipped with the proverbial prison spoon, are chipping away at the bedrock of their hidden instincts and dreams, struggling to rediscover the possibilities of their masculinity. I have also seen mothers of sons and other women who love men in poignant struggles with the same prison walls, as they recognize on some level that this narrowing of masculine identity and possibilities will surely eventually steal their beloved boys away if nothing is done.

A great deal could be written here about the queering of gender and sexuality as a path of liberation. There is no doubt that the experiences and inquiries of queer men have represented a rich avenue for opening up possibilities of maleness beyond the narrowed imagination of modernity. Notably, later forms of the Green Man such as the Classical Greek Dionysius demonstrated exceedingly fluid expressions of gender and sexuality, such that the male “fertility god” would become an ally of queerness and sexual liberation just as much as a symbol of heterosexual potency (c.f. Evans, 1988).

Perhaps this apparent juxtaposition can still be seen in the fluid and glam pageantry of male rockstars, semi-queer sex symbols who may be like contemporary visions of the perennial avatars of the Lord of the Dance. Such a juxtaposition—whether found in Dionysius or in Elvis Presley—seems to say something about the deeper nature of ecosexual seminal vitality, which I present in Chapter 3 as the mythic image of the ever-fluid waters of life. Thus, fluidity has been found at every turn to be essential to the mythos of the Green Man, for even the ancient Sumerians knew Dumuzi as the shapeshifting god of the river's flow. Thus, the masculinity of the Green Man, however potent it may be, is never a rigid heteronormativity—for his mythos is awash in creative fluidity. The attitude of the Green Man thus naturally accords with the position that no identity should limit the possibilities of what one can imagine or who one may become.

From this perspective, I do not find engagement with the myths of the male fertility god to be antifeminist any more than I see an essential conflict between gendered myths—such as the Goddess and the Green Man—and contemporary projects to progress cultural norms beyond limiting definitions of gender, sexuality, and romantic love altogether. Mythology includes tales of asexual, presexual, pansexual, homosexual, bisexual,

and omnisexual kinds of beings, right alongside heterosexual ones—the coexistence of gender and genderlessness, of heterosexual and queer identities, is not contradictory within mythos. For mythic traditions are participatory, and as Ferrer (2017) would attest, different expressions of the unlimited creativity of the cosmos may coexist without contradiction within a participatory paradigm. Or, as Hillman (1996/2013c) put it: “Myth contains many versions; myth requires many versions” (p. 153).

Thus understood, each mythos is a portal into its own unique realm of possibilities, all of which grow out from the creative opportunity of life. I can celebrate all kinds of myths because it is clear to me that liberation is served whenever the curtailed imagination of modern monoculture is opened into new possibilities—whether or not such possibilities appeal to me personally. Ecology thrives in multiplicity, and as long as humanity lives, it seems clear that humans will continue to enact diverse forms of gender and sexuality in endless varieties. Such creativity, after all, continues even in the midst of repressive regimes, just as diverse species of plants and animals continue to find a way to live and sometimes even thrive within the desolation of asphalt landscapes.

As I have presented herein, diversity is fundamental to the archetype of the Green Man. The forest guardian Humbaba had to be affixed into a singleness of form—named and affixed by the consciousness of the patriarchal gods that Gilgamesh brought to bear—before he could be overcome and cut down. So one finds the Green Man illuminating Hillman’s caution regarding “singleness of meaning,” (1997/2014c, p. 93), “singleness of identification,” (1986/2016d, p. 293), and “the singleness that I condemn as literalism” (1997/2014c, p. 93). Hillman’s words make a useful warning for any heirs of Humbaba’s legacy—a warning to emergent avatars of the Green Man as to the need to preserve the fluidity that is so close to the heart of the god’s power.

Dionysius would one day come to be known as *Lysios*, among other epithets, which in Hillman’s (1972/2016g) terms, “means loosening, setting free, deliverance, dissolution, collapse, breaking bonds and laws, and the final unraveling of a plot in tragedy” (p. 29). The Greek god of theater was, after all, also the god of tragedy—and as the ever-dying god surely knows better than any, one’s final moments are fundamentally a transformation of form. The embrace of death is the ultimate mastery for the shapeshifter, for it is precisely the ability to embrace the profound range of life’s forms—even unto and

through death itself—that makes the Green Man the *Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, as Kérenyi (1976) subtitled his book. To evoke *Dionysius Lysios*, then, is to invite a return to such a radical fluidity of imagination that all limitations of identity and possibility are liberated—like Humbaba before fixation, like clay thrown back into the river, like the waters of life in their endless return to the unlit and unnameable depths, where all fixation is undone and anything one can dream may be.

If a patriarchal and imperial masculinity has been the enemy of such fluidity and diversity, then surely a recovery of the fluid and ecological masculine is part of the cure. Thus, an *epistrophê* of the Green Man—alongside a recovery of the Goddess—is a deeply indicated *therapeia* for patriarchal wounds. As awakening beings seek out expressions of masculinity capable of harmonizing with the Earth and its life systems, some guidance may be found in the ancient traditions of male gods who conquered nothing, but grew like vines, danced like lovers, and returned to the waters of birth and death with a uniquely fierce grace.

Hero and Heros

The feelings of alienation and ecological crisis that motivated this research emerged for me in early childhood, but

they have become clearer and more developed through education, and have finally culminated in this investigation into the roots of modernity's archetypal challenges. Like many people—especially young people—who are drawn by these questions, I have privately hoped that it might be possible to identify some weak spot in the demons of apocalypse, or to find some buried key in some ancient tome or tomb that might lead to modernity's redemption. For better or worse, such aspirations are more or less definitionally heroic. Heroism is brave and problematic. In my teens and 20s, it seemed more brave; as I grow older, it seems more problematic.

In the first semester of my PhD studies, I took a course with archetypal mythologist Craig Chalquist. I particularly recall Chalquist's discussions of both heroism and evil. Chalquist noted that J. R. R. Tolkien's (1955) archetypal symbol of evil appears as "the lidless eye"—indeed, this symbol is emblazoned in large on the cover of the first edition of *The Return of the King*. As Chalquist observed, a lidless eye is an eye that cannot turn inward; it is literally incapable of introspection (Chalquist, personal communication, early 2016). A mode of perception without the ability to self-reflect must fixate all of its fantasies upon the outer world.

What is most striking to me is that such a stuckness in outward-facing perception is equally characteristic of the crusading hero. Gilgamesh, as the first hero of the modern tradition, also exemplifies this outward-facing quality. All of his considerable energies are directed toward the transformation of the outer world, and thus he cannot turn and reflect upon the destructive realities of his own life. As such, the first hero of the modern tradition is also, arguably, the first villain. Looking closely here, one sees how the hero and the villain arise together from the same mythic root, as if each were the shadow of the other. Such a reflection is intimated again and again in works of moral fiction and fantasy, for the resonance is an open secret—"secret" only because the lidless eye cannot turn inward to perceive its own shadow.

The question of heroic vision requires a closer look, because it is certainly not wrong to imagine a better world. Nor is it wrong to allow one's personal portion of suffering to propel visionary action—such might be the essence of compassion. It is not even wrong to imagine that one may serve some instrumental role in a larger process of healing, for while dreams of great service may be ambitious, perhaps unrealistic, the world also needs souls who keep such visionary hope alive.

The problem of heroism is not vision, nor ambition, nor even idealism, for these are all better than the cynicism that slays hope. The problem of heroism—at least of Gilgamesh's heroism—is that its crusade is compensatory for what is unresolved within, and what will remain unresolved as long as the lidless eye cannot see its own dark inside, cannot face its life and death, cannot meet its underworldly passage. As Hillman (1976) observed, the shadow of mighty heavenly heroes like Hercules and Jesus Christ lies in the fact that they only enter the underworld to wage war against it, which is in essence a rejection of the underworld's true initiation. The true underworldly initiation is not characterized by triumph but by deep surrender—thus the capacity for surrender is the key difference between the hero and its mythic predecessor and counterpart, the *heros*.

I have already introduced the figure of the *heros* in Chapter 5, citing Gottner-Abendroth's (1980/1995) work on the male consort of the Great Goddess. The *heros* is, in this sense, a name for an enactment of the Green Man mythos—a name, perhaps, for his avatars, or at least ceremonial actors. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, semi-divine wild-man figures like Humbaba and Enkidu could be described as *heros*. Indeed, the *Epic* is fascinating in part as a place where the new tradition of the

hero differentiated itself from the ancient lineage of the *heros*—for it was against the backdrop of the *heros* that Gilgamesh defined his course, rejecting death and service to the Goddess.

As the *Epic of Gilgamesh* portrays, both the hero and *heros* are powerful; to speak psychologically, both represent extraordinary mobilizations of vital energy. One can see very clearly in the *Epic* that this mobilization arises from an existential encounter with life and death. Such a keen awareness of mortality is a particularly human experience, and I suggest that this difference between the hero and the *heros*—both of whom seek to guide humanity in regard to the issue of death—is whether the reaction to this awakening takes the form of an outer crusade or an inner transformation.

As civilization began, for the first time, to domesticate large swathes of wilderness, it became possible for humans to imagine that wilderness itself might be domesticated. Wilderness is forest, mountain, and desert—but it is also something more than any literal geography. Wilderness is also an existential reality, and as such it appears most starkly to the human psyche in the form of death. Gilgamesh, as the first hero, sought to defeat wilderness as nature, but more than this, he sought to defeat death itself. Of course, he failed, as every human who has tried has failed, but civilization took up his

legacy and has continued the quest to overcome wilderness and defeat death. The results of this—both ecocide and alienation—are unfortunately evident.

The path of the *heros*, on the other hand, predates this heroic crusade, as human awareness of mortality surely predates civilization's fantasy that death could be defeated. Thus, while the first hero rejected the Goddess of life, the more ancient *heros* always married her. While the first hero cut down sacred trees, the *heros* was their defender and the champion of the Goddess. And while the first hero crusaded against death, the *heros* followed the example of the ever-dying god, whose shapeshifting being was so fluid that it carried him even through the transformations of dying into mythic rebirth.

Such rebirth is no conquest of death, for the Green Man—as seen in the myths and rituals of so many lands—always dies, again and again, often cruelly. The ever-dying god seems no more capable of escaping mortality than was Gilgamesh—the difference is that the Green Man, the *heros*, is never seen to crusade against it. The mastery of the *heros* is the paradoxical triumph of surrender—a fully willing passage through life and death. To put this another way, the same vitality that the warlord throws against wilderness is also present in the psyche

of the *heros*, but appears rather as an exquisite intensification of participation in the mortal experience.

I must note, now, that for me this distinction is not only theoretical. My personal psyche experienced a radical transition between these two possibilities that signaled paradigmatic changes in my own life. It happened something like this:

*I am in the midst of the data-gathering phase of my research, and I am in attendance in an ayahuasca ceremony. I stand above a fallen tree, purging and praying to the Goddess of the full moon above. Every time I purge, my visions are of my own decapitation by axe, felled like the rotting tree beneath me. Neither the gore nor the pain is what interests me, but rather the fact that my fear has somehow lifted—like some lifelong sense of inner aversion has miraculously evaporated. I laugh, I roar, I purge, and I behold the moon and the inevitability of my own death. The power, the ceremony, and the courage of life all stand before me, and I ask the moon—fiercely, sincerely, repeatedly—**is this pleasing to you?***

It became clear to me in this visionary experience how even death may be subsumed into the devotional path of the *heros*. The Green Man demonstrates, through his mythos, a way to love—and not seek to conquer—the Goddess of life, death, and wilderness. This evaporation of existential aversion is a

fundamental change in the psyche of one so initiated; thus the initiates of Eleusis were said to live the rest of their lives “without fear of death ... [with] confidence in the face of death” (Kerényi, 1967, p. 15). The Eleusinian Mysteries famously involved revelations of the Greek fertility goddesses—less famous in the present moment is the fact that the male gods of fertility, including Dionysius, were also central to those rites (c.f. Kerényi, 1967).

Though such initiations may help to release the fear of death, the resulting fearlessness has nothing to do with forced positivity or existential innocence. On the contrary, the Eleusinian Mysteries and similar initiatory traditions are closely entwined with underworldly themes, involving intimate encounter with the energies of death and dying. Death, wilderness, the underworld—these are powers that overthrow the ego, and therefore make possible the “gesture of worship” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 22) that one finds embodied in existential initiates. The “gesture” is an attitude of surrender, as in the famous poses of the dancers depicted in Minoan art with their hands raised to the Mountain Goddess in “the most complete acceptance of the grace of life the world has ever known” (Groenewegen-Frankfort, 1951, p. 186). Notably, such surrender has nothing to do with passivity. On the contrary, it is

not passive at all, but rather the active intensification of life's vitality as awakened in the face of death.

Humans who undergo such initiation—of which the *heros* is one example—find that a flourishing of life energy awaits them. Perhaps this helps one to grasp at the deeper symbolic significance behind accounts of ritual sacrifice—as in Frazer (1890/1994): “The killing of the god, that is, of his human incarnation, is therefore merely a necessary step to his revival or resurrection in a better form” (p. 278). Perhaps it is such a revitalized self that may arise after the death initiation—for the release of existential aversion liberates reserves of psychological and creative potentials. All of the power that was latent in innocence, or invested into strategies of avoidance—all of the power that warlords like Gilgamesh throw into outward-facing campaigns against wilderness and death—for the existential initiate, runs freely into the artistry and beauty of life. Thus, in Frazer's (1890/1994) terms: “Far from being an extinction of the divine spirit, [the god's sacrifice] is only the beginning of a purer and stronger manifestation of it ... a revival or resurrection of him in a more youthful and vigorous form” (pp. 278–279).

In this way, the vital kingship and the death initiation are entwined with one another. Such is the invitation that the

Goddess extends to the *heros*—extended too to Gilgamesh, though he refused it. It is, one might say, an invitation for self-awareness to crown the ecological community with willing participation. Such willing participation is not possible in the same way for the innocent or unselfconscious animal, who cannot face the mortal condition to the same degree, and thus cannot consciously follow the path of the *heros*. This is why marriage to the Goddess is also an underworldly descent—as intimate awareness of death is the unavoidable price of the ring and the crown.

Since the dying god is the ancient guide to this mystery, one could say that the Green Man himself is a potential symbol for the return from modernity's alienating crusade back into participation—not a return to primordial innocence but rather a return to the willing passage through death and therefore through life. The sacral bull—as, for example, once sacrificed by Mediterranean priestesses wielding the double-bladed *labrys* ax (c.f. Kerényi, 1976; Sjöö & Mor, 1987)—is thus a fitting symbol for the ecstatic self-sacrifice of the *heros*. Such mythos was no doubt the backdrop for my own visions of decapitation under the light of the moon Goddess—and what I learned in those visions was that the sacrificial bull, so full of vitality, is on the level of mythos performing an act of fierce and willing participation in

this inevitable part of life's journey. All mortals die—the mythic bull is uniquely vital as he leaps to meet this fate.

Without initiatory models or technologies available to me during my own youth, my reactions to these existential pressures initially took, in some ways, a similar channel as that of Gilgamesh: fantasies of world-saving heroics. The transition from hero to *heros* may loosen the grip of such fantasies while paradoxically awakening deeper possibilities of cocreation—for while the hero may look at the willing surrender of the *heros* and see passivity or weakness, the truth is that the courage of the *heros* is no less. The difference is that his care is more like that of the gardener, a creative and green-thumbed discipline that seeks to nourish life while knowing full well that the wheel of seasons will turn again toward death. Such is the discipline of the Green Man.

An understanding of the psyche of *heros* has not only helped to reshape my personal life experience, it has also helped to transform my understanding of this research, and indeed, my understanding of knowledge altogether. For if the *heros* is in part gardener, then for the *heros*, knowing cannot be an effort to conquer unknowns, cannot be a matter of objective truth, and certainly cannot be a dry and arid effort. Instead, knowing must

be a life-giving and relational act, like watering thirsty plants—
or making music.

The Evolution of Enchantment

The inclusion of accounts of personal mystical experiences within scholarly research remains epistemologically questionable within the disenchanted academy—how much more so when such visions involve the use of mind-altering substances. Even those sympathetic to the increasingly evident therapeutic and spiritual benefits of conscious psychedelic use tend to hold to the assumptions of secular modernity. For example, while Merkur (1998) came out in favor of the potentials of psychedelics, his basic premise remained: “Psychedelic unions are all experiences of imagination” (p. 156).

This position may seem reasonable enough until one examines the meaning of “imagination” in modernity—for “experiences of imagination” (Merkur, 1998, p. 156), within a disenchanted context, inevitably mean that something is imaginary and therefore not real. This represents a diminishment from the traditional respect given to the power of mythos, which is not imaginary, but is rather that which is perceived by the faculty of *Imagination*, a genuine capacity for knowing and interacting with nonordinary or nonvisible dynamics of reality.

Ferrer (2017) described such Imagination as “the noetic faculty ... [whose function] is to raise sensual/perceptual experience to an imaginal level in that isthmus between physical and spiritual realms” (p. 298). That is to say, Imagination can be considered as a faculty of experiencing and knowing reality, comparable to rationality or empiricism. In contrast, as one sees in the case of Merkur (1998), even the most open-minded forms of secularism cannot help but demote “experiences of imagination” (p. 156) by relegating them to a category that is at most personally meaningful, intrapsychic, only a dream. To believe otherwise, of course, must amount to superstition. This is a bias that any quest for re-enchantment must ultimately confront.

From the beginning of this inquiry, I have described disenchantment—the loss of myth and mysticism from the everyday lives of contemporary people—as involved in modernity’s ecocide and the loss of wilderness. What has become increasingly clear is that this such a link is ancient, for it reaches back at least to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which modernity’s first hero wages a dual crusade against both the trees of the sacred forest and the old gods that live there—as if the multiplicity of the ecological gods and the multiplicity of the ecological wilderness are one and the same. Disenchantment

and ecocide have historically and symbolically come hand in hand, and the result has been an impoverishment that is simultaneously material and nonmaterial, both a matter of biology and of soul.

This self-imposed impoverishment of both ecology and mythos is why, for all its extraordinary scientific and technical acumen, modernity finds that it is forced to “feed wretchedly on all other cultures ... [for] here stands man, stripped of myth, eternally starving” (Nietzsche, 1872/1993, p. 109). Faced with this invisible form of cultural starvation as an unusually sensitive child, I intuited that modernity’s crises of nature were inseparable from the impoverishment of the dreaming soul—and so began a lifelong quest for re-enchantment that has led through dreams and nightmares, and later through other kinds of visionary experiences, to eventually meeting of the figures of the Goddess and the Green Man in all their timeless glory.

If the idea of genuinely meeting ancient gods seems inflated, fantastical, insane—then one has once again run up against the disenchantment of modernity. Ironically, this disenchantment creates precisely the kind of imaginally impoverished experience that tends to confirm its own skepticism. Understood as imaginary figments, cultural artifacts, and primitive beliefs, the figures of myth receive

neither the respect nor the epistemological perspective that is needed to draw them forward into perception and cocreation. Ferrer (2017) has demonstrated a keen awareness of this issue, insisting that “autonomous nonhuman entities composed of energy and consciousness may exist, as well as participate in the cocreation of subtle worlds, both independently and through interaction with human enactive powers” (p. 228).

This topic needs to be treated with a certain degree of care. It is not enough to issue a blanket rejection of secular skepticism—for this would be to simultaneously issue a blanket acceptance of any kind of supernatural claim, without discrimination. Ferrer (2017) has similarly recognized the complexity of this space between modernity’s biases of disenchantment on the one hand and an uncritical acceptance on the other; in his words:

Can scholars dance between etic and emic, insider and outsider stances, in their approach to spiritual phenomena, particularly those involving supernatural or metaphysical claims? ... To this end, transpersonal scholarship may need to navigate successfully between the Scylla of uncritical acceptance of all emic claims (“romanticism” and “going native”) and the Charybdis of

assuming Western epistemological superiority
("colonialism" and "epistemic violence"). (pp. 53-54)

The question is, how should one begin to assess metaphysical or supernatural claims, given that both secular "objective" skepticism and a blanket uncritical acceptance are equally inappropriate? To my mind, the problem here is a failure to discriminate between imaginal and material realities—which is a problem intertwined with modernity's failure to recognize imaginal realities as "real." Concerns that the bracketing of metaphysical claims may ultimately amount to little more than a dismissal of anything that isn't secular seem to be warranted—and yet, if imaginal capacities can be restored to a place a dignity as a form of real intelligence and perception, then the distinction between imaginal and material phenomena becomes a service to soul as much as to science.

Drawing here on Hillmanian psychology, there is impoverishment that happens to mythos when one takes its depths too literally—supernaturalism is not only a sacrifice of empiricism, it is also a sacrifice of the richness of soul. This insight is an aspect of the hermeneutic of hospitality I propose in Chapter 2: the suggestion of an attitude that neither takes psyche literally nor dismisses it as imaginary, but holds it as nonmaterially real and entirely efficacious in the realms and

dynamics of soul, culture, mythos, and the hidden or buried dimensions understood to be moving within and beneath all things.

This imaginal capacity of knowing—if not confused with material literalism—can fully synthesize with empirical knowledge to form an intelligence that is neither superstitious nor disenchanted. This is not a division of labor in which imagination is intrapsychically valid and empiricism is better for assessing the world—because imaginal intelligence is not only internal and personal, but may also move, as Abram (1997) put it, “laterally, outward into the depths of a landscape at once both sensuous and psychological, the living dream that we share with the soaring hawk, the spider, and the stone silently sprouting lichens on its coarse surface” (p. 10).

When this living dream is understood as both empirical and imaginal—that is, as knowable through the full range of skillful epistemic engagement—then it becomes clear that re-enchantment, while certainly mythic and imaginal—while unabashedly considering as real the affairs of the psyche—need not be taken as superficial or literalistic. As West African shaman Somé (1995) put it: “Enlarging one’s vision and abilities has nothing supernatural about it, rather it is ‘natural’ to be a

part of nature and to participate in a wider understanding of reality” (p. 226).

What begins to emerge is a recognition that superstition itself is an artifact of modernity. When invisible realms are not respected, when mythic intelligence has been demoted to “imaginary,” then the only route for soul to be taken seriously is its literalization into matter. Thus, a current online search for the *Anunnaki*—one name for the ancient Sumerian gods—mostly turns up popular theories regarding an ancient race of extraterrestrials who are supposed to have once ruled Mesopotamia. At least as a race of aliens, the gods can be taken as real. This would seem to be an improvement over their position in modernity as fictions—only myths.

Here one finds the underlying energy of superstition—as Hanegraff (2003) articulated, superstition should be understood as a reaction to disenchantment itself. Thus, participatory cultures are not superstitious—rather, they practice an integrated epistemology that includes imaginal faculties of knowing. Only the children of modernity, as a result of disenchantment, feel that they must choose between rationalism and superstition. By this same token, a deep and genuine re-enchantment does not result in superstition, but actually makes superstition nonsensical—for when what is invisible is respected

as real, there is no need to attempt to make it real through superstition.

More recently, increasingly sophisticated methods of measurement have revealed much that is invisible but nevertheless demonstrably real. As this process continues, mechanistic assumptions may give way to a growing recognition of the infinitely sophisticated dynamics of complex systems of existence. Perhaps soon modernity will begin to perceive the dynamics of psyche as real to the same degree as other invisible but efficacious realms such as microbiology and quantum physics. I suspect that the increasing mainstream prevalence of conscious entheogenic ceremonies may play a major role in this transition.

Such would signal the beginning of what Stroud (2004) termed *open naturalism*—a worldview that combines the rigor and rationality of the scientific mind with a release of the metaphysical biases of materialism. Ironically, such a release may in fact open modernity's rigorous inquiry to become more purely scientific—that is, available to all possibilities and perspectives, and less metaphysically biased. Ferrer (2017) has similarly regarded such open naturalism as the resolution of modernity's long campaign against anything that triggers the fear of superstition:

Open naturalism questions the traditional transcendent/immanence opposition by bridging the gulf between the “natural” and the “supernatural.” In addition, open naturalism critiques this opposition: once it is acknowledged that modern scientific naturalism may not necessarily exhaust the possibilities of the real, envisioning a multiverse or multidimensional cosmos inclusive of a rich variety of subtle worlds or realms becomes increasingly plausible. (p. 247)

Such an open naturalism is, in part, prefaced on the understanding of cosmos as processual—what Abram (1997) called “the flux of participation itself” (p. 59), or in Hillman’s (2001/2016j) words: “this fire that allows no objective fixity” (p. 129). In such a cosmos, one cannot settle too deeply on a predetermined understanding, for the shapes of psyche are alive and changing, their possibilities shifting like the landscape of a dream. Thus, one’s relationship with cosmos must similarly stay alive in real time—not dead as in the case of predetermined beliefs about reality held by a calcified and self-separated intellect. As Ferrer (2017) put it:

As human beings gradually open themselves to the epistemic power of all human attributes, they can perhaps realize that through the exercise of their own creative

capabilities they are fostering the unfolding of the mystery's infinite generativity in the world. ... The world then stops being sensed as having an independently objective nature and becomes a relational and intersubjective reality. (p. 142)

In a processual and multidimensional cosmos, in which reality is cocreated in real time by intersubjective dynamics, the ecological shapeshifting of a Green Man who dances within changing ecologies makes a deeper kind of sense—and so too does an attitude of open naturalism that allows the human intellect to move beyond metaphysical precommitments into a deeper curiosity. Such fluid and open attention, grounded in the present moment, would seem to be epistemologically indicated within an emergent flux of cocreative cosmos. Furthermore, this may also be just the adjustment that the modern intellect needs to overcome its dysfunction of alienation, for it is precisely the separation of believing in its own calcified belief systems that allows the modern intellect to divorce itself from living experience. Thus, the approach of open naturalism may not only be a philosophical improvement, but may also be a spiritual and ecological necessity, a *therapeia* for the homecoming of the mind.

I sit at the edge of some kind of party. Perhaps 12 years old, I am hidden in the shadows of the stairs, watching the gathering below. There is a kind of constant emptiness in me that I don't understand and don't know how to explain. Nearly every day for as long as I can remember, I have wished sincerely that I was never born.

This sense of desperation grows in me as I watch the party-goers. I am praying into the darkness. I don't know to whom I pray, and I do not yet have the words, but what I am praying for is some end to this alienation. More than anything, I do not want to feel so separated—not only from the human community, but from the entirety of life, my own body, the flow of existence. My lips are silently forming the prayer: "I would give anything ..."

I am startled when I hear a deep voice answer back from unknown depths: "Anything?" It will be many years before I form an idea of who or what has answered my call. I do not know how long the path will be, nor what it will entail, but there in those shadows, I have had my first encounter with the guide that I will one day know as the Green Man.

The intellect can do great service to soul. Mythic and psychological study has helped me to make sense of and ultimately deepen my relationships with mysterious and

powerful figures that I began to perceive in my youth. Ironically, however, I suspect that the greatest gift of my education has been a dawning recognition of the limits of the intellect. For an obese young Jewish-American scholar whose primary sense of success in the world was intellectual, dethroning the mind was no small task.

Yet, my knowledge-seeking has always been motivated by a drive to free myself from contemporary alienation. Given such a quest, I eventually had to face the fact that no amount of intellectual activity, in and of itself, could heal the underlying exile—for the nature of the disconnection is, in part, precisely that of the intellect's own self-inflation. This is the same phenomenon that Ferrer (2017) has called *mental pride*, which is

not associated with what is conventionally regarded as a proud personality. By mental pride we mean the deep-seated disposition of the mind to consider itself the most important player or chief director of any process of knowledge and/or able to attain complete understanding without the collaboration of other human attributes. (pp. 138-139)

Thus, the vision of personal decapitation that I described in the previous section takes on additional meaning: the

beheading of the *heros* or other existential initiate may signify a transcendence of humankind's "deep-seated disposition" (Ferrer, 2017, p. 139) for intellectual separation and the arrogance of abstraction. Philosophically speaking, this involves a growing recognition that the intellect's presumed mastery over the world—a mastery that takes the form of fantasies of objective representation and total knowledge systems—is not actually tenable.

Such decapitation cannot only be abstract insight, for it must be an act of the rational mind noticing and taking its place as an organ of embodied and ecological being. This must be, then, an embodied transformation—which helps to explain the use of practices like entheogenic ritual, which tend to throw the mind back into embodied experience, as in the visceral quality of my own visionary decapitation. One also finds this visceral quality in a shift toward "cosmic speech" (Hillman, 1989, pp. 228–230) instead of abstract intellectual language—indeed, there is something very psychologically visceral about "decapitating the *cogito*" (Hillman 1997/2014c, p. 93).

Contrary to what a secularist paranoia may suspect, *decapitating the cogito* does not murder rationality; it only kills "mental pride" (Ferrer, 2018, p. 138). In fact, the result is a renewed possibility for the intellect to synthesize with "the

collaboration of other human attributes” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 139). This is important because for Stroud’s (2004) open naturalism to fully realize its possibilities requires the expansion of human intelligence into its complete epistemic range. The activity of knowing must go beyond the limits of the rational intellect and into a participatory synthesis of the many ways to sense and know—such that “body, vital, heart, mind, and consciousness are considered equal partners in the exploration and elaboration of knowledge” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 126).

Interestingly, such an expansion into holistic intelligences accords particularly well with the tradition of the Green Man—perhaps because the self-transcendence of the underworldly death initiation is anathema to mental pride. Evans (1988) summarized this particularly well: “The essence of the Dionysian tradition is the affirmation of the whole self through ecstatic ritual. Patriarchal civilization takes one facet of the person—the rationally calculating ego—and identifies it with selfhood” (p. 183). In this sense, participatory holism may be precisely the way out of what could be called the patriarchal mode of consciousness itself.

As one’s personal body is the most immediate and intimate wilderness of their experience, the dynamics of relationship within the embodied self naturally tend to be reflected in the

human relationship with the wildernesses of the Earth. Thus the tyranny of “mental pride” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 138) within the human being and the tyranny of the human being within natural ecologies are akin to one another. Furthermore, in naming the psyche as another kind of wilderness of being, one may note that this same decapitation can also open the intellect into the value of cocreative relationality with forces of spirit and soul. As Ferrer (2017) put it:

As the mind gradually lets go of its pride and opens itself to learn from the other human attributes and collaborate with them as equals in the elaboration of knowledge. ... The mind becomes humble, recognizing its intrinsic limitations and realizing that it does not need to know everything because there are greater sources of knowledge to which it can be connected. Then the mind can rest and relax, attain inner peace and silence, and become porous to the immanent and transcendent energies of the mystery—energies that respectively vitalize and illuminate the mind with a knowing that the mind will never be able to encompass fully with its mental structures, but to which it can be attuned and by which it can be inspired and guided. (p. 139)

In summary, one finds that the true decapitation of the *cogito* involves multiple levels: an opening into the holistic intelligences of the embodied self, a renewed relationality with the ecologies of life in which one is situated, and an awakening cocreativity with the forces and powers of psyche that move beneath, usually hidden. Each of these are aspects of re-enchantment.

Re-enchantment as a lived fact is not a motto one wears on a button but an act of radical epistemological transformation requiring liberation from “the rationally calculating ego” (Evans, 1988, p. 183). It is no small thing, “decapitating the *cogito*” (Hillman, 1997/2014c, p. 93). Yet, such a transformation is probably necessary in order to overcome “mental pride” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 138) and create space for a genuine expression of Stroud’s (2004) open naturalism: that is, a form of modern mind at last willing, like the *heros* of old, to turn toward whole-hearted participation with an overwhelmingly enchanting cosmos.

What is left when the intellect surrenders its dominion? What is left when rationality relinquishes its total knowledge project and the hero gives up the crusade? Immediately evident is that the living world remains, the “flux of participation itself” (Abram, 1997, p. 59)—and within it, the body, living as it has

always lived in immersive relationship with its natural ecology and its instinctual knowings, like wild Enkidu on the mountain of his birth, in the midst of an ancient and animal home that has never been lost and can never be lost.

Ecstatic Embodiment and Homecoming

I am in the midst of my first entheogenic journey, which is with psilocybin mushrooms. The visions have already progressed for some hours and continue to get stronger. As I roll about on the floor awash with the intensities, a Goddess speaks to me. Her voice begins as a symphony of insects beneath the earth, their synchronized movements creating a compound of sounds that together form a subterranean orchestra. This orchestra has always been playing, yet I have never heard it until now. The subterranean music—the Goddess’s speech—is slowly modulating to my ear across a difference in timescale, for her mind and her speech is orders of magnitude grander and slower than my own. Her timescale is the birth, life, and death of entire forests. Nevertheless, emerging between us, there arises a shared language—and a sense that she has been waiting for me to attend these lessons of which I am in certain need.

The Goddess of the hidden world of soil and subterranean sound shows me my own buried depths, a sense of river-like

channels forming a network through my body, a maze of hidden electrical circuitry. Stimulated by the magic of the mushrooms, these circuits are flooding with a magnitude of energy far greater than they are used to—which is why I am currently uncoordinated and writhing about on the floor. With countless feelers like fungal threads, she reaches through this secret body. “Your circuits are atrophied,” she tells me. “We can heal them together, but it will take time. Years.” I agree to make this commitment, and I feel her fungal threads wrap around my finger like a wedding band. I see then how the oak tree lives and dies in the web of her mycelium.

Exile from ecology runs deep within modernity, and as the body is the first wilderness of being, that exile is encoded first in a general disconnect between the inflated ego-mind and the demoted body-being. When Hillman (1986/2016d) wrote of his aim to “release the mind into its originality beyond the old entrapped condition” (p. 295), the implication is that the original home is not something to be found in the outer world, but is a quality of being within oneself but beyond the entrapped mind. One may note here that, experientially, it is impossible to feel at home anywhere if one does not feel at home in their own body. Thus, the original exile is firstly an exile from the soil of

embodiment, and as such, the body is where homecoming must begin. As Ferrer (2017) put it:

When the body is felt as our home, the natural world can be reclaimed as our homeland as well. This double grounding in body and nature not only heals at its root the estrangement of the modern self from nature, but also overcomes the spiritual alienation—often manifesting as floating anxiety—intrinsic to the prevalent human condition of arrested or incomplete incarnation. (p. 87)

Such a “prevalent human condition of arrested or incomplete incarnation” (Ferrer, 2017, p. 87) raises an interesting question: what would be complete incarnation? Defining embodiment is itself a challenge, because while all of us are in-bodies, some sense of disembodiment appears to be widespread. This is certainly in part an effect of modernity, but one can also take it a step further: a degree of disembodiment may be a more or less universal human experience—though often hidden until revealed by the contrast with certain peak experiences that touch into something closer to complete incarnation. Dancers, lovers, athletes, musicians, mystics, and so on might know something of these moments in which it feels almost as if a divine grace enters one’s skin, moving within one’s body, granting the possibility of total embodied attention.

Such experiences of total embodiment would seem to be related to the phenomenon of ecstasy—which as I describe in Chapter 2 comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, meaning literally “to stand outside of oneself” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Such a translation at first seems odd, because in such ecstatic embodiment one could be said to stand within oneself more than at any other time. The apparent contradiction becomes sensible as one perceives the “prevalent human condition of arrested or incomplete incarnation” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 87), and thus the widespread identification of the human self with the ego or conditioned mind. As Sjöö and Mor (1987) put forth: “Ecstasy is the dance of the individual with the All. ... *Ek-stasis* means standing outside of ‘one’s self,’ and so canceling out the conditioned mind” (p. 52).

In other words, it is the conditioned mind and identity that ecstasy “stands outside of,” which is exactly why such ecstasy may open up faculties of a more total incarnation—a relative return to the more ancient homeland of the sensuous animal of the flesh. Indeed, such moments of ecstatic embodiment may even feel tragic, as in their fleeting passage they make clear the severity of habitual alienation—that is to say, they show us how far we all may be from fully coming home.

I have described various examples throughout this research of myths and legends of avatars or channels of the Goddess and the Green Man—singers, dancers, ecological queens and kings, priests and priestesses, and so on. The idea that such people may have, at times, not only taken on ritual roles and costumes, but really channeled divine energies or presences and more-than-human capacities through dances, songs, perhaps even their very lives—this seems radical from the perspective of a disenchanted modernity, which thus tends to dismiss such figures as entirely mythic, “imaginary.” However, in light of a participatory opening to the fuller range of human potentials, and because the realities of embodied ecstasy continue to be evident within human experience even today, I personally suspect that such figures are more than symbolic, and are examples of the kinds of powers that may open for such masters of ecstasy.

I use the phrase “masters of ecstasy” with a certain irony, for in one sense, mastery and ecstasy may be contradictions in terms. It is hard to know to what extent it might be possible to stabilize ecstatic peaks within human lives, but it seems likely that any egoic agenda, including that of mastering ecstasy, necessarily drives ecstasy away. In the mystic poet Rilke’s

(1920/n.d.) words: “What is extraordinary and eternal does not *want* to be bent by us.”

This same insight may be found in the Green Man’s motifs of epiphany: the sudden and uncontrollable appearances and disappearances of the ecstatic god (c.f. Otto, 1965). While various practices can invite ecstasy to arise, control over its summoning tends to remain elusive even for seasoned practitioners, such that master artists, musicians, and dancers nevertheless find themselves somewhat at the mercy of forces of inspiration. *Ekstasis* thus remains always beyond the command of the ego—which makes sense for a power so profoundly associated with the energies of wilderness, a power that by definition “stands outside of” of the conditioned self.

While ecstasy may refuse to be commanded, this does not mean that it is therefore only ephemeral, only a passing breeze. The flux of ecstasy may come and go, but it leaves a footprint, like the channels carved into the earth by a river’s flood. We have found images of such flooding rivers, after all, codified in the myths of the god of ecstasy from the most ancient recorded times. As Hillman (2008/2016l) described it, this might be the very essence of the Dionysian: “the living sap inside plants, the intoxicating ferment in wine—much like Freud’s pleasure principle” (p. 61). If such ecstasies are the gift of a god, then

perhaps they are indeed never to be commanded, never controlled—in which case, the ecstatic master’s integration could only amount to a trickle of the overwhelming flood of the vital spirit, only an echo of the potentials of complete incarnation. If so, then such trickles and echoes may nevertheless represent the highest potentials of embodied actualization possible within the mortal human life.

Thus I heard from the Goddess, as I was flooded for the first time with her entheogenic ecstasies: *“Your circuits are atrophied. ... We can heal them together.”* Several years and many peak experiences later, I cannot say that I have stabilized such divine energies into the ongoing state of my daily life—and yet, as the Goddess promised, I have indeed been quite radically transformed. This transformation has occurred on both an inner and outer level, which is to say, the touch of the Goddess and Green Man has wrought transformation of my personal being, body, and life.

To begin to relate this transformation: I first spent two years immersed in the ecstatic initiations, soaking up the transformative powers of entheogenic ceremony. It is possible, in the right conditions, for such practices to help dissolve a great deal of the “mental pride” (Ferrer, 2018, p. 138) that stagnates the modern mind, thus potentially helping to restore

holistic intelligences and a sense of cocreative participation with the living world. This was my intention as I engaged in such a transformative immersion for two years. Following this period, many of my personal attachments and fears were gone, and shortly thereafter I sold my belongings and left the country of my birth to begin traveling the world as a solo backpacker.

Since then, I have mostly wandered India as a nomad, typically staying and studying with various spiritual elders, yogis, musicians, and so forth. In PhD programs, there is a phenomenon colloquially called “candidate in the cave,” in which a student may vanish from sight and potentially never emerge with a completed dissertation. For awhile, it seemed like I might literally become a candidate in the cave, as I found myself living at times in quite cave-like situations in the far reaches, whether beneath a village monastery in the mountainous desert of Ladakh, where I practiced fasting and meditation for months, or in a rustic wooden cottage on the land of a Shaivic priest in the Himalayas, where I practiced chanting and running daily circuits through the wilderness valleys of that land.

All of this was fundamentally a process of coming home to myself. Ironically, this homecoming became far more accessible as I wandered for years without home through the wildernesses

of India. I suspect this has something to do with returning to a general sense of shared humanity, an embodied sentiment that we are all fundamentally on this cosmic journey together, and that the walls that separate humanity from itself—whether built around one’s home or around one’s homeland—cannot truly divide any of us from the great and terrible wilderness that holds our lives and our deaths. In the context of such existential wilderness, we all share the same home, for we all share the same humanity. Thus, a part of my own homecoming has also been immersion into the wildernesses of the Earth—from the California Redwoods to the mountain forests of the Himalayas and the tropical jungles of South Kerala—an immersion that very gradually evaporates the conditioned fears and feelings of separation that modernity creates.

But the most intimate homecoming has been that of my own body, for following entheogenic immersion into two years of sustained visionary experiences of the Goddess and the Green Man, I have subsequently shed over a hundred pounds of fat and put on a prodigious amount of muscle—releasing lifelong obesity and coming instead into an experience of a strong and fit body. My transformation happened not so much in the gym as in the forest, where I found that the natural landscapes and their

inhabitants could teach me memories of my own embodied instincts.

Certainly, one could credit such transformations to adjustments in my lifestyle; my diet and exercise regimen are radically different than they once were. Yet while this is true, I see such changes more profoundly as an almost direct materialization of the self-sacrificial release of aversion and awakening of vital strength that came through the touch of the gods of ecstasy. As a result of changes in the deepest places—those initiations in the depths of the underworld, those subterranean symphonies and sacrificial beheadings—my relationship with pain, effort, beauty, life, and death has been transformed. Changes in my physical habits and therefore body are reflections of that.

I meditate on this multilayered journey of transformation now as I run miles through the jungle storms of the Himalayan monsoon season, feeling the power and coordination of my body as I climb into the mountain wildernesses without fear of forest or lashing rain. As thunder rolls through the valleys, I can feel the Green Man's "gesture of worship" (Kerényi, 1976, p. 22) growing in my heart and in my life. Such growth may only be an echo of the ecstatic embodiment that I know is possible, as a human life may only be a trickle of the flow of the universal

creativity, but as I think back to the voice that I heard in the darkness of my youth—the voice that asked me how much I would be willing to give for the possibility of coming home—I reflect that the trickle of a god is quite enough to transform a mortal life.

Music and Participation

I introduce, in Chapter 1, a link between music and the archetype of the Green Man, but what exactly is the nature of their connection? Given how frequently this relationship comes up, it would seem to be deeper than an accidental association of history—and also likely more than literal music, for “Dionysiac music,” as Otto (1965) put it, is something that quite specifically: “transforms the world in which life had become a habit and ... obliterates with the melody of the uncommon which mocks all attempts at reassurance” (p. 140).

Nearly a century before this, Nietzsche (1872/1993) had also touched on the same mystery, for the subtitle of his famous Dionysian work—*The Birth of Tragedy*—was of course none other than *aus dem Geiste der Musik*: “From the Spirit of Music.” A surprising title, for what is this *Geiste*, this ghost, this “Spirit of Music”? It occurs to me that perhaps I now, too, have seen the *Geiste*—beheld the spirit that moves in the orchestra of the Goddess, like some invisible coordinator of life’s symphonic

synchrony. Such synchrony permeates the whole of life's pattern, like the insect hive making clear the small part that every mortal—from musician to carpenter ant—has to play in the whole. Thus, the *Geiste* enfolds the entirety of every mortal life and death, as the "Dionysiac music ... mocks all attempts at reassurance" (Otto, 1965, p. 140).

It is interesting that themes of musicality have played so prominently in my own mystical experiences, for while I have always enjoyed singing, I was not much of a musician until—in tandem with my physical transformations—I experienced a musical awakening opened by the same touch of the gods of ecstasy. If health and strength are sometimes manifestations of life's vitality—as in the case of the *heros*—then perhaps music might be a mortal expression of life's aesthetic beauty.

By beauty I do not necessarily mean what is "pretty"—rather, prettiness may be only one kind of beauty. Beauty can also be terrible, ancient, wise; like the underworldly Osiris, dismembered and resurrected, beauty is certainly not limited to the realms of youth and ease. Sometimes what is young and easy may not have found its own beauty yet—for the beauty that I mean, and that seems to be suggested by the mythos of the Goddess and the Green Man, is not tied up with appearances so much as with vital creativity: that is, with the sensitive, flexible,

innovative, and indomitable power of life's double spiral
wending its way through the density of soil, soul, and time.

Such a beauty can take many forms, but beneath all of its countless manifestations one finds a common element of vital strength. Such vitality signals the presence of the waters of life, found at the root of flourishing vegetation of any kind. Or, to move instead with the musical metaphor, every hand-carved woodwind has its own unique character and story, yet in all cases it is the breath of life blowing through the hollow that gives voice to the music. Such "breath support" of vitality must blow within the beauty of all life, as in each of us such breath blows, literally in the lungs like bellows, feeding our cells and our voices—and also perhaps more subtly in the "inner channels" of our beings as I beheld in my early visions with the Goddess, and as were later elaborated in further visions.

I am in the last of the ayahuasca ceremonies I will undertake across two years of intensive immersion. I lie on the ground and breathe in and out so heavily that my breath becomes like a roar. Deep within myself, I am wrestling—caught between the vital strength that I have felt awaken in these ceremonies and what feels like an overwhelming weight of life's terrors and labors. I feel viscerally how much energy is required to rise up and meet such challenges with a willing intent.

As I perch on this precipice between courage and despair, a strange power unexpectedly rises up in me like a swelling of music. It is as if a spontaneous symphony begins to play within my muscles, bones, and breath. Not despite of but exactly because of the heaviness of life's struggle, a strength within me is growing like an oak. My understanding of lion-heartedness clarifies in this intersection between life's considerable weight, tremulous mortal courage, and the majesty of this sudden music.

I recall the Cowardly Lion whom I played on stage in my youth, as well as the years of nightmares through my childhood—and it occurs to me that this rising majesty is neither a denial of fear nor its transcendence, but quite precisely its redemption, as the roar growing in my breath is not a denial of the lifelong quiver of my voice but quite precisely its actualization, its tremulous fulfillment.

In retrospect, it was from this vision more than any other that music began to open for me. The powerful vitality, courage, and sincerity of the lion's roar—nothing “pretty” in it—is what became my doorway into my own song. In the three years since, my voice has continued to open, and I've also taken up the harmonium as accompaniment—becoming, somewhere in the midst journeys in India, a *bhajan* and *kirtan* chanter, as well as

developing a fusion of such traditional styles with more contemporary genres and lyrics.

Singing is, for me, always a kind of prayer—whether it is in ancient Sanskrit or in modern English. Finding one’s voice, opening into one’s own song, is no less a homecoming than landing in one’s own body—for indeed, the voice is inseparable from the body. In fact, the voice is a unique bridge between the ancient body and the conditioned self—for while one’s words may be shaped by intellect, the voice itself is far older and full of instinct. Voice is furthermore powered by breath, which is to say by muscle and bone, and thus it is a matter of embodiment. In chanting and singing, this bridging between mind and body can become a pathway of conscious exploration—thus, in India, *bhajan* and *kirtan* are considered as avenues of awakening, often associated with the *bhakti* yoga of devotion and the opening heart.

While voice as an exploration of one’s personal somatic psychology is rich enough in its own right, it is made even richer by the understanding that the “Dionysiac music” (Otto, 1965, p. 140) is much more than literal sound. After all, as I began to hear the orchestral majesty in the midst of my own entheogenic experiences, it was not literal sound at all. The “sound” awakened music in me, yes, but as in the case of the Goddess’s

hidden symphony beneath the earth, what I really beheld was something more like a multimodal patterning interpreted musically within the echo chamber of my own consciousness. Perhaps this is to say that true music has nothing to do with sound, but is this patterning itself—in which case, perhaps life can be considered, fundamentally, as a musical phenomenon, at least in the light of the gods of ecstasy. One might indeed then call all of life, as Nietzsche (1872/1993) put it, *The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music*.

I am returned to Anderson's (1990) observation that the Green Man is not only a visual image but is "equally powerful when transmitted through dance ... and in the rhythms and melodies of poetry and song" (p. 18). Given the closeness of music to the awakening of more ancient embodied intelligences, it would seem fair to say that music has the potential to bring about a more direct apprehension of archetype than any image, description, or theory. In this sense, the Green Man may be more adequately described in an epiphany of music than in an exegesis; and indeed, the divine symphony—whether the music of the spheres or that of the subterranean Goddess—may offer a more immediate apprehension of cosmos than the most precise calculations of "objective" measurement.

So, then, why have I bothered with this exegesis at all? Why not just play music? Had I been raised in a participatory context then perhaps, in the words of Walker's (1998) "Susannah," I would "prefer to ... listen to music and just kick back" (p. 187). It is possible that such participatory activities might indeed render a more intimate personal understanding of life's flows than a work of research ever could. However, I was raised within modernity, within a cultural and ancestral predominance of rational intellect. Thus, much of my work here could be described as an effort at bridge-building, an invitation to the modern intellect—first of all my own—to come home from a seemingly interminable period of alienation.

For the sake of all life as well as for the sake of the intellect itself, the modern mind must be invited out of its destructive solipsism and into a cocreative harmony with the bigger picture of human and ecological holism. In order for this to be possible, the mind must realize first of all that there is indeed a symphonic whole—a symphony of intelligences to join back into—and that the opportunity being offered is not fundamentally about conquest or control but rather about cocreative play within the musicality of cosmos. Such realizations are part of the breakthrough that I experienced as I first heard that majestic music rising in my own being, for there

were profound insights that arose along with the Dionysian “sound”.

One, my being had always been singing a unique song. I had simply been deaf to it, for such deafness is symptomatic of modern disenchantment, which does not believe in or perceive invisible things like Dionysiac music.

Two, my song affects all beings around me, for interconnection is the nature of life, and invisible communication permeates all ecology. Such interconnection was also shown to me within the Goddess’s subterranean orchestra, in which a kind of hidden synchrony pervaded everything. With this in mind, the song of despair I had “sung” all my life was revealed to me as more than personal—just as the opportunity to make beautiful music is also more than personal.

Three, all beings are on a journey of awakening and ownership regarding the contribution of their unique songs. All have the opportunity to deepen perception and participation within the aesthetic and musical opportunity of life.

Four, intellectual knowledge has no intrinsic value, for it does not do anything in and of itself. Knowledge comes alive as it enters relationship; it becomes valuable as it feeds the ecology of being. In a very Dionysian sense then, knowledge can

be assessed in terms of ecological and relational beauty—that is, it can be considered as music.

Thus, the epistemological inquiries that I have included from the very beginning of this work—ideas like Hillman’s (1981/2013a) “poetic basis of mind” (p. 31), Ferrer’s (2017) “relational and intersubjective reality” (p. 142), and Anderson’s (1990) “uttering the Logos as foliage” (p. 100)—have come full circle, offering a philosophical context for a transformation of modernity’s mind toward an experience of immersive ecology and aesthetic musicality. Such ideas may seem like philosophical abstractions, but the realities they represent are far from abstract. As one travels deeply down the rabbit-hole of participation, as one quests sincerely enough for the possibility of homecoming, then eventually, as Hillman (1981/2013a) put it: “‘fantasy’ and ‘reality’ change places” (p. 31).

In other words, the alienated intellect of modernity still has the opportunity to open into the enchanted music of cosmos. This is not a matter of belief—it is not about joining a religion, or becoming superstitious, or rejecting rationality. Re-enchantment has nothing to do with any such ideology—it is, rather, an experiential immersion into one’s faculties of sensory and imaginal intelligence, much as the musician may gradually

open to an ever-richer array of sounds that the unpracticed ear cannot hear.

As humans, we are born with participatory faculties alongside rational ones. All kinds of intelligences can be cultivated with practice. To my mind, the mythos of the Goddess and the Green Man suggest that the cultivation of our full holistic range is not only our organic birthright, but also our responsibility as awakening beings who are born into and must partner with an interconnected, ecological, and indeed symphonic whole. Such awakening is a matter of both courageous vitality and an ever-deepening intersubjective sensitivity, which together create the preconditions for humans to grow toward a willing and actualized aesthetic participation in life's ecological orchestra.

The Question of Significance

Through engagement with such myths and traditions through these last years, my own life at least has changed a great deal. I have changed a great deal. It is strange to hold together the disparate ends of a transformed life. I vividly recall being the boy hiding in the shadows on the stairs, praying desperately for rescue from an alienation that I could not describe. I recall the many years of nightmares and terrors—and the sense that I was trapped within my own life, a feeling that

stretched from early childhood into decades that felt like eternities. Sensitivity, from the point of view of that child, was a curse, for it forced an immediacy of confrontation with collective dysfunctions that modernity naturally prefers to deny. Yet, I now see these experiences as blessings, for they have given me the impetus to break through parts of my own alienation into a revitalized sense of participation and enchantment.

I do not relate my experiences because I think I am unique. On the contrary, I relate them because I suspect that on some level similar processes may be occurring increasingly broadly. Journeys of transformation like mine might represent possibilities of breakthrough within modernity's larger cultural fabric—which seems now to be a necessity for humanity's survival. In this sense, the investment that has gone into my own becoming, my holistic education and lifelong seeking, may find its justification in the fact that this has not only been a personal matter. It has also been the questing tip of an ancestry that is striving to come home, and perhaps now strives more urgently than ever.

When the context of exile is best measured not in the years of personal biography but in the millennia of cultural history, then the hope for homecoming starts to seem more like

a prayer than a rational goal. Yet, in the eternity of my own childhood, this is also how I felt as I prayed for the miracle of reconnection. When exile seems endless, when the mode of consciousness itself becomes exile, it begins to make sense that “Only a god can save us” (Heidegger, 1976/1981, p. 57); it begins to make sense to imagine “a new kind of people” (Leopold, 1944, p. 1); it begins to make sense to radicalize healing in terms like “decapitating the *cogito*” (Hillman, 1997/2014c, p. 93). All such phrases point toward the need for—and the difficulty of—a deep shift in modernity’s paradigm.

Perhaps, then, an individual’s paradigm shift is not so insignificant. As Nietzsche (1872/1993) wrote: “What hopes must awaken in us when all the most certain signs augur ... the gradual awakening of the Dionysiac spirit, in our contemporary world!” (p. 94). An individual’s renewal indicates that such renewal is possible—and that does seem like a promising place to start. Similarly, while a mythic *epistrophê* of the Green Man may be a small contribution in the face of the massive material forces of patriarchy, empire, and ecocide—one may note that seeds are also small. My hope is that like a seed, retrieved from an ancient time and replanted in today’s soil, a remembered mythos may also grow into something that is life-giving. My experience is that this is possible.

Thinking in such nonlinear terms may be required by the present moment, as rational and linear assessments of trends in ecology and culture yield sobering predictions to say the least. To return again to songwriter Seal's (1991) prophesizing lyrics: "We're never gonna survive unless we get a little crazy." Perhaps getting a little crazy is the *therapeia* needed now—and so I have offered a reconstruction of the mythos of the God of Madness, who perhaps should be better called the god of unconditionality, for it seems to me that the nature of his madness is actually that of the unconditional.

By the unconditional, I mean something like the transformed psyche of the *heros* who has been initiated into the inevitability of death. The consciousness that remains after such initiation is "mad" because it has gone past the need to calculate ends—for the one who has seen death, the end hardly needs to be calculated. Thus seasoned by the underworldly encounter, the heroic agenda of victory gives way to either despair or a more complete aesthetic participation—depending on whether one makes it through the underworld "alive." In the words of the mystic poet Rilke (1920/n.d.), "*Die Siege laden ihn nicht ein. Sein Wachstum ist: der Tiefbesiegte von immer Größerem zu sein.*" Victories do not entice such a person. For

their growth is in surrendering ever-more deeply to something ever-greater.

A tree grows in widening rings at its own pace and without the need to calculate. This vegetal fact provides a clue as to the mind of the Green Man—"the Logos as foliage" (Anderson, 1990, p. 100). His ancient head is fused with eternally growing vines, indicating that vegetal thought also grows like this, like the widening rings of trees. As Rilke (1905/1997) put it:

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it. (p. 48)

Similarly, Jung (1932) wrote: "The greatest and most important problems of life ... can never be solved, but only outgrown ... not solved logically ... but faded out when confronted with a new and stronger life-tendency" (p. 89). Is this not the plant-like growth of consciousness, its "widening circles"? My own life has been characterized thus, for I certainly never "solved" the problems of my youth. For many years, I had the same recurring nightmares—they simply slowly became lucid. Lucidity never solved my nightmares either, but rather grew up around them, gradually pervaded them, drenching

them in awareness. Eventually a day came when those childhood nightmares had lost their terror and compulsion—such an organic process takes decades.

The circle then widened further, beginning to pass through the threshold of my own embodied being as inner dream states began to integrate into materialization in the waking world. A vital strength slowly grew, beginning in the privacy of a child's nightmares, but gradually finding its way into something like lucid waking, lucid living. One day, my body did not resemble the body of my youth, nor did my mind, nor did my life or relations. Such growth of widening circles is slow to the human eye—as the timescale of the Goddess's forests seems slow—but such slowness eventually delivers the acorn to the oak. Do not the same vitalizing waters also flow through human roots?

Being a devotee of the Green Man has come to inform my life and intentions in many ways. Generally, like the vegetal god, I seek to sink my roots into soil that sustains me: natural wildernesses, my own body, and the most nourishing aspects of culture and story. Like a tree that grows on the river's banks, I seek to stand in the flow of the waters of life—sharing the creative energies of cosmos with the dancing ecology into which I've been born and into which I will die. As a manifestation of

life's arising consciousness, I seek to direct the flow of such energies through expanding holistic intelligences toward the possibilities of healing, growth, and vital beauty. And like all of nature, I seek to grow into a fullness of experience beyond former limits—and toward this end, to open ever-more toward transformative ecstasy.

How much of the transformation in my own life has been by my choice? I can take a certain credit for willingness, a desperate readiness for change—but the growth of widening circles never belonged to me. It has always belonged to life, and like the acorn, I have been carried in its process—a process that is quite clearly as old as time, and might be another name for the vital god's own endlessly evolutionary flow. In the midst of such endless shape-changing, I find myself wondering just how far this circle may yet widen. If the waters of life, these spiraling vegetal vines, have been able to break through the ancestral wounding of my own life and the alienation of my own mind, if this ancient and extraordinary instinctual intelligence—"the Logos as foliage" (Anderson, 1990, p. 100)—has been able to weave a bridge from the invisible depths of ancient dreams into the midst of the modern world, in the process changing my body and my being, shaping this research, pouring onto this page,

then in spite of all reasonable pessimism in the world, I cannot help but wonder what will happen next.

While wondering, I no longer imagine that it is my task to predict—for the praxis of unconditional aesthetic surrender has little need to concern itself over the future. After all, what good is knowing that doesn't enrich participatory beauty, that doesn't add to the ecological orchestra of life? Thus, unconditionality is the wild and vegetal praxis of the Green Man, ancient and august and always in the present, growing like the widening rings of trees. Why should an ancient god of life justify himself according to any rational calculation of impact—like an artillery officer firing off rounds? Like any god, the Green Man lives according to his own “mad” logic, loving not in obedience to the notions of another god or goddess, but in his own particular and life-giving way.

A Very Old Dream

As I close this account now, I am finally fulfilling a chapter in my own stewardship, in a covenant I made with mythos in dreaming depths long ago. The magnitude and poetry of that covenant, which has become something of a life journey, is poignant in my recollection:

For I am on the back of a great sea dragon, green-scaled and bearded, as he seeks to throw me off and devour me. He has

been sealed beneath the earth for ages, long-forgotten by humankind, growing increasingly enraged in his buried tomb. "Do not eat me," I try to bargain. "We can make a deal." I do not know who this being is, only that he is immensely powerful, more so than any presence I have felt before. After some time—for he cannot destroy me within my own dream—he growls back: "What could you possibly offer me, mortal? I shall eventually manage to devour you."

I search for some answer that might satisfy him. What do I have to offer such a powerful and ancient spirit? It is clear that I am no match for him, cannot fight against him. With a sudden flash of inspiration, it comes to me: "I can help you be remembered," I say to the writhing, flying, bearded serpent. "I can help them remember your name and hear your stories again."

He feigns disinterest, but I see that I have struck a nerve; he wants to be remembered. He still tries to throw me from his back as he ponders my offer; any trusting accord between us will be long in the making. Finally, he speaks again: "Very well, mortal. It will be interesting, at least, to see you try."

And so I did. So I have.

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